

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

December
2008
January
2009

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

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December
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ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE



**The Skinny on
Despereaux,
Delgo and
Drinky Crow**



**Special Toon
Anniversaries
& Milestones
Issues**



Bolt Unleashed: Disney's Dog Has His Day!

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There's beauty and pictorial wit from opening to end credits. The story fluidly integrates gorgeous, impressionistic flourishes with the kind of hyper-real details one has come to expect from computer generated imagery: photorealistic textured stone and fur so invitingly tactile you want to run your fingers through it.”

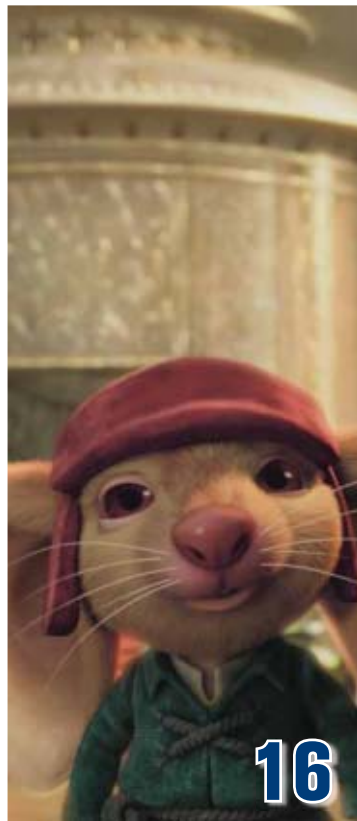
— Manohla Dargis, *New York Times*

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Cover: Co-directed by Byron Howard and Chris Williams, Disney's 3-D feature *Bolt* signals a new era for the animation studio.



As we were getting ready to push this final issue of the year out of the gates this month, there seemed to be a flurry of news on the 3-D front. Not only did this month's cover story, Disney's great-looking *Bolt*, begin to build its holiday-season momentum, we got word that the Mouse House is investing more in this brave, new immersive frontier.

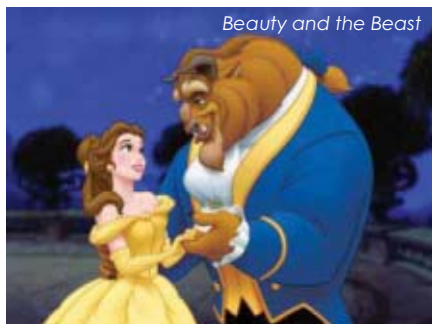
The studio is preparing a digital 3-D version of the acclaimed 2001 feature *Beauty and the Beast* for a 2010 re-release. The talented team of producer Don Hahn and co-directors Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale will be overseeing the 3-D transformation. According to the filmmakers, the plan is to go back to the original animation files and use the separate background, effects and character animation elements to create an enjoyable 3-D experience. Pixar's *Toy Story* and *Toy Story 2* will also be ready for their 3-D close-up in the next couple of years.



This means Mickey's studio will be truly riding the 3-D wave in the near future as Pixar's *Up*, Jonas Brothers' 3-D Concert Movie, Jerry Bruckheimer's *G-Force* and Robert Zemeckis' *A Christmas Carol* are slated for 2009, while Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, *Toy Story 3*, *Rapunzel* and *Step Up 3-D* will debut in 2010. The studio also announced a major five-year deal

with IMAX to release its movies on the very big screen.

All of this is fantastic news for those of us who like their animated experience fully immersive and on a grand scale. However, I have to tell you what I heard after we'd just enjoyed a 3-D screening of *Bolt*. The little boy sitting next to me was totally captivated by the movie—and like most members of the audience, couldn't get enough of the brave superstar dog and his hilarious traveling companions. After the film was over, he grabbed his mom and said, "Wow. That was totally awesome! But, you know what? After a while, I forgot that it was like 3-D! Except for the part where the hamster was coming right at you."



That's the great thing about good storytelling and memorable characters. When a movie is really working its magic, we do forget about the razzle-dazzle of new technologies and all the latest immersive illusions and only care about the heart and soul of the story.

Since this is our official holiday season issue, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you, our loyal readers, for continuing your support of this publication. Your thoughtful feedback and helpful e-mails mean a lot to all of us here at Animag. In the words of *Bolt*'s Rhino, I wish you all a "fully awesome" holiday season and a fantastic new year.

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
rzahed@animationmagazine.net

Quote of the Month

"Except for the sexy/creepy part ... 21st century Tinker Bell is a chubby-cheeked, slightly infantilized adolescent with the body of a grown woman. She also sports the skimpiest dress in the movie. Disney's non-Pixar CGI films still render humanoids as plastic mannequins, so the whole affair has the feel of a conspicuously arousing episode of *Jimmy Neutron*."

—Sam McPheeters writing about the new CG-animated Tinker Bell in *The Village Voice*



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January

5-8 Hong Kong hosts the largely attended **Toys & Games Fair** this week (hktoyfair.hktdc.com), which includes a seminar on the latest toy safety directives.



6 If Santa gave you some cool cash during the holidays, there's a nice selection of new animated DVDs arriving in stores today. Some hot titles include *Frisky Dingo: Season Two*, *Heathcliff: Unleashed!*, *Duckman: Seasons Three & Four*, *Ni Hao Kai-Lan: Celebrate With Kai-Lan* and *Transformers Animated: Season Two*.

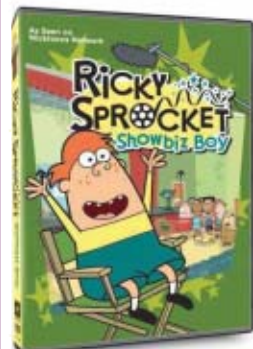
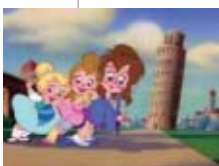


8-11 Check out the latest gizmos and tech tools at the **Consumer Electronics Show** in Las Vegas. Disney-ABC TV's president Anne Sweeney and Activision CEO Michael Griffith are scheduled to speak (www.cesweb.org). New this year is **Hubbub**, a global animation festival held at the Vegas' Palm Resort in conjunction with CES.

9 Directed by David S. Goyer, the horror movie *The Unborn*, starring Odette Yustman and Gary Oldman, offers some winter chills. Also opening today is Pascal Laugier's reboot of Clive Barker's popular screamfest, *Hellraiser*.



13 The beginning of the year DVD release-fest continues with *Ben 10 Alien Force: Season One, Vol. 2*; *Alvin and The Chipmunks: The Chipettes* and the re-released *A Chipmunk Valentine*; *Ricky Sprocket: Showbiz Boy* and *Voltron, Vol. 7*.



15-25 Check out the first big animation newsmakers of the year at the **Sundance Film Festival** in Park City, Utah. (festival.sundance.org/2009). You can also catch a collection of cool toons at this year's edition of **Slamdance Festival** (www.slamdance.com).



16 *Supernatural*'s Jensen Ackles makes the leap to the big screen in the *My Bloody Valentine 3-D* thriller.



19-21 Learn all about the ins and outs of marketing children-driven properties at the **Kids Marketing Mega Event** in Naples, FL (www.iirusa.com/kids).



20 Craig McCracken's cute little crime-fighters deliver the goods in *The Powerpuff Girls: The Complete Series—10th Anniversary Collection* DVD set. Also out today is *Animalia: Talent-O-Topia*.



23 Opening today in theaters is the fantasy *Inkheart*, based on the popular book by Cornelia Funke. The lavish feature stars Brendan Fraser, Andy Serkis and Eliza Bennett and is directed by Iain Softley. You can also sink your fangs in the new epic *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans*, starring Michael Sheen, Rhona Mitra and Bill Nighy.



25-27 *Les jouets* are the main attraction at the **Paris Toy Fair** this week. (www.univers-enfants.com).



26-29 Chuck Lorre, Tyler Perry, Anne Sweeney and Ben Silverman are honored at this year's **NATPE**, the busy TV market held at the Las Vegas Mandalay Bay resort this week (www.natpemarket.com).



27 Decisions, decisions ... too many new animated DVD titles arrive today, but here are five top picks: *Open Season 2*, *SpongeBob SquarePants: Spongicus*, *Scooby-Doo Where Are You! Season One, Vol. 1*; *Pink Panther and Friends: Classic Cartoon Collection* and *The All-New Superfriends Hour: Season One, Vol. 2*.



30 ASIFA-Hollywood presents the star-studded **Annie Awards**, held at UCLA's Royce Hall (www.annieawards.org). Mike Judge, John Lasseter and Nick Park will receive the Winsor McCay achievement honors this year.

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.



Books We Love

Disney's Dogs

By Tamara Khalaf

[Disney Editions, \$19.95]

Dog lovers have been accustomed to seeing wonderful animated recreations of their favorite pets in Disney classics. A wide variety of these memorable canine characters are featured in Tamara Khalaf's new book, which moves smoothly from classic stars such as Goofy and Pluto and the 101 Dalmatians to sidekicks such as *Cinderella's* Bruno, *Peter Pan's* Nana and *The Great Mouse Detective's* Toby. Fortunately, they also include far-from-traditional "dogs," such as *Stitch* (*Lilo & Stitch*), *Zero* (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*) and *Slinky Dog* (*Toy Story*)—although including the carpet from *Aladdin* and the footstool from *Beauty and the Beast* was a real stretch! Either way, we don't know many who can resist the charms of *Lady and the Tramp* or even Disney's latest CG star, Bolt. In addition to the usual concept art, model sheets and thumbnails, the book's designers have also given us a fun flip-book section at the end of this volume. This one's going to keep our tails wagging, although we're hoping that one day the dogs will get the big art-book treatment rather than the 7 x 7" format available this year.

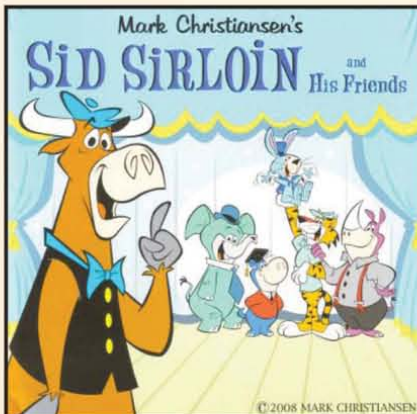


Sid Sirlain and His Friends

By Mark Christiansen

[Self-published, \$5 plus \$4 shipping charge]

Veteran animator Mark Christiansen has cooked up a real treat for those of us who can't get enough of Hanna-Barbera's classic Saturday morning shows from the late 1950s and 60s. The talented artist who has worked for Disney TV Animation, Warner Bros. Animation, Nick and Cartoon Network recently published a fun



homage to the world of Yogi Bear, Snagglepuss, Top Hat and Quickdraw McGraw. His colorful 36-page storybook centers on a TV cartoon star (Sirlain) and his pals Presto the Magic Rabbit (no relation to the Pixar short star!), Bungle Bengal and Meany the Rhino, Eeny the Hippo and Schmoe the Elephant (who are inspired by The Three Stooges). We challenge you to flip through the pages of this book without having a stupid smile appear on your face. You've just got to admire the way Christiansen has captured the look and delightful spirit of all those toons with a few strokes of his pen. It makes us wish Sid and company would get their own show on TV real soon! You can order the book by visiting the artist's blog at markscartoonart.blogspot.com.

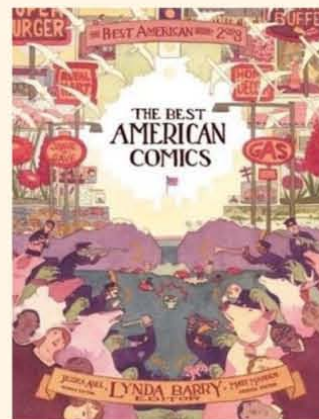
The Best American Comics 2008

Edited by Lynda Barry, Jessica Abel and Matt Madden

[Houghton Mifflin, \$22]

Let's say you were an extra-terrestrial who just landed on our planet and wanted to sample highlights from our country's graphic novel and comic-book movements. I'd immediately recommend the latest beautiful hardcover *Best American Comics* collection that hit bookstores just a couple of weeks ago. Followers of Lynda Barry's mind-blowing comics (*The Good Times Are Killing Me*, *What It Is*) will be happy to know that the goddess of childhood angst is this year's guest editor, and she's put together a remarkable collection that is representative of the best of both established artists such as Seth, Chris Ware, Matt Groening, Alison Bechdel and Jaime Hernandez and relative newcomers like Kevin Pyle (*The Forbidden Zone*) and Gene Luen Yang (*American Born Chinese*). What unites many of these pieces are the fine attention to detail and the surprisingly profound moral and social themes they delve into. Graham Annable's disturbing *Burden*, for example, tells the seemingly simple tale of a young man who is trying to make up for the messy aftermaths of his brother's mistakes, while Eric Haven's *Mammology* is a curious time-and-space-bending tale which deals with everything from TV to superheroes and food. Basically, it's the kind of anthology you'll want to force on all your friends, especially since it includes a chapter by Evan Larson featuring an alien having sex with a football! ■

—Ramin Zahed



Boop Oop a Doop: The Musical!



It took Fleischer Studio's toon star **Betty Boop** eight decades to make it from Toon Town to Broadway, but it looks like the sexy flapper is getting her own musical in the 2010-2011 season. Hugely successful pop composer David Foster is preparing the show's

music, while the book will be written by Oscar Williams and Sally Robinson. In the new musical, our favorite flapper and her pals, Bimbo and Koko, help reunite her grandfather with his long-lost love while saving the Happy Heart Theater from evil developers. Anne Hathaway, please contact your agent, asap!

Going Green All the Way

Five years ago, acclaimed French animator **Jacques-Rémy Gireld**'s first feature *La Prophetie des Grenouilles* (Prophecy of the Frogs) attracted much acclaim at festivals and in European theaters. This month, he's back with another beautifully designed, hand-drawn feature exploring environmental themes. **Mia et le Migou** (Mia and the Migoo) follows a young girl whose fantastical journey to rescue her father leads to an encounter with an unusual creature called Migou. Evoking both water-color paintings and pastel illustrations, the movie also addresses the mistreatment of workers, the destructive forces of greed and the human responsibility to take care of our planet. Produced by Folimage, Plus One Animation and France 3 Cinema, the movie is distributed in France by Gébeka Films and handled internationally by Celluloid Dreams. We hope Gireld and his talented team get lots of global recognition for this visionary and poetic film in 2009. ■



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Santa to the Rescue for the Game Biz

Big titles break in time for the holiday shopping season.

By Ryan Ball

Like everybody else, videogame developers and publishers have been feeling the pinch of a tough economy, but many hold out hope that Santa will save the day. The holiday season has always been good for the industry, and there's no shortage of top titles battling for consumers' hard-earned cash. We'll look at a number of big releases out just in time to make your Christmas shopping list.

The Tale of Despereaux

Brash Ent. brings us this adventure title based on Universal's CG-animated feature film about a little mouse who refuses to accept his limitations. The gameplay follows and extends the film's storyline in adventures spanning



from the magical kitchen and colorful rooms of the castle to the dark dungeons of the rat lairs. An introductory training mode helps players get in touch with their unique rodent abilities so they can help Despereaux stand up against a host of animal and human foes in his quest to save Princess Pea. Multiple difficulty settings ensure that players of all ages have a good time. The game is available for Wii, Xbox 360, PlayStation 2,



Nintendo DS and PC.

The DS version utilizes unique movement mechanics like swinging, climbing and sliding, as well as challenging puzzle elements designed specifically for the DS's stylus input. The game debuts ahead of the Dec. 25 release of the movie, which boasts the voices of Matthew Broderick, Dustin Hoffman, Emma Watson and Tracey Ullman.

Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors

Po and the Furious Five are back to kick some more tail in this new Nintendo Wii and DS game from Activision. As chubby panda Po, players will try to live up to the title of Dragon Warrior by defeating the vengeful Tai Lung and preventing him from capturing the Furious Five.

The Wii version allows fans to execute powerful martial arts moves using the Wii Remote and Nunchuck in co-op Story Mode or head-to-head Versus Mode. Players can also enjoy mini-games and connect wirelessly to the DS version in order to unlock exclusive multiplayer characters on the Wii.

DS users can battle as Po and Tigress on an epic journey spanning more than 40 levels. The stylus can be used to pull off a number of cool moves, like the ability to swing on ropes and launch catapults. Other special attacks can be unleashed by drawing symbols on the screen.

In addition to the new game, fans of the hit DreamWorks Animation movie can now pick up the DVD, which con-



tains a 20-minute animated companion film titled *Kung Fu Panda: Secrets of the Furious Five*. A big-screen sequel is planned for June 3, 2011.

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

This rare mash-up of videogame and comic-book worlds has a lot of gamers geeking out as characters from the *Mortal Kombat* franchise take on DC

superheroes for the first time ever. The Midway release presents a dark, gritty world created in partnership with the comic-book writing team of Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Gray (*Countdown*, *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters*), along with veteran *Mortal Kombat* team members.

Brought together by a cataclysmic force, the heroes and villains of *Mortal Kombat* and DC Comics must battle to save the world, though in-fighting may blind them to the dark threat poised to destroy them all. Players can choose sides, challenge friends and take the fight online with Xbox 360 Live. The game is also available for PlayStation 3.

Each character from the *Mortal*



Kombat and DC universes has specific abilities and signature finishing moves to be excuted in various iconic environments, including Superman's Metropolis, Batman's Gotham City and the familiar Kombat settings Hell and Graveyard. There are also several never-before-seen combo arenas that offer a blend of the two worlds. The new fighting system features Freefall Kombat for mid-air battle while falling from one arena to the next, and Klose Kombat for brutal, up-close fighting complete with progressive damage represented by visible bruises, torn clothing and other nasty details. We hope the game also provides band-aids.

Quantum of Solace

There's a new James Bond flick in theaters and gamers can now get into the action with the official videogame from Activision. Introducing a more lethal and cunningly efficient Bond, the game blends intense, first-person action with a unique third-person cover combat system that allows players to use stealth, precision shooting and lethal combat skills to progress through missions.

Developed under license from EON Prods.

Ltd, Sony Pictures Ent. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, the game blends



elements from *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*, and features the voices and animated likenesses of franchise stars Daniel Craig and Dame Judy Dench. The cast also includes

French actor Mathieu Amalric, who plays villain Dominic Greene in the new film, new Bond girl Olga Kurylenko, Eva Green as Vesper Lynd and Mads Mikkelsen as the villainous Le Chiffre.

This latest interactive 007 mission is based on the *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* game engine with systems specifically engineered to immerse players in the Bond universe. Treyarch developed the game for Xbox 360, Wii and PlayStation3, while Eurocom worked on the PlayStation2 offering. Beenox Studios is responsible for the Wii and Windows versions, and Vicarious Visions brought it to Nintendo DS.

Final Fantasy XIII

The latest installment in the hugely successful *Final Fantasy* saga revolves around a futuristic civilization illuminat-



ed by the Light of the Crystal. Little is known about the Crystals, which have the ability to create life forms and objects, and are believed to give instructions to supernatural beings known as fal'Cie. Developed by Square Enix, the eagerly awaited RPG debuts on Dec. 12 and promises to deliver the latest in cutting-edge technology with intuitive controls and seamless transitions between real-time gameplay and impressive in-game cinematics.

Available on the same day is *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, an alternate version offering a wholly independent story set in another part of the universe with different characters. In a fantasy world resembling elements of modern day Japanese cities, a prince stands as the last remaining member of a royal family which controls the last Crystal in existence. Players must ensure that the powerful artifact remains in the right



hands as two warring nations battle each other for dominance. The title will be available for PlayStation 3.

Left 4 Dead

There's nothing like a bloody zombie survival game to get you in the holiday spirit. Judging by the robust marketing campaign behind this new Valve title, Electronic Arts is confident that it will be one of the top-selling offerings of the fall season.

The game takes place in the weeks following a massive infection that has bred ferocious zombies that appear to be mutating into even deadlier beings. According to a blog on Valve's website, the art direction aims to capture the tone and feel of being in the middle of a horror movie. Achieving this involved a blend of creative color correction, film grain, vignetting and local contrast.

Valve has created a pretty impressive animated intro movie for the Xbox 360 and PC game. Brave souls can check it out at www.l4d.com. Ever wonder what the Incredible Hulk would look like as a walking corpse? ■





LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE

Energetic, sharp and great-looking, *Bolt* barks in a new era for Walt Disney Feature Animation. by Ryan Ball

The dog days of summer may be gone, but Disney's latest action-packed adventure-comedy just may have what it takes to launch a blockbuster franchise nonetheless. The fur-covered family film was produced for stereoscopic 3-D exhibition and is the first Mouse House feature to be overseen from beginning to end by Pixar principal John Lasseter. By all accounts, some of that Pixar magic has rubbed off on the film, which opened in North America last month.

Directed by Chris Williams and Byron

Howard, *Bolt* tells the story of a canine TV star (voiced by John Travolta) that is inadvertently shipped from Hollywood to New York City. During his cross-country journey home to his owner, Penny (Miley Cyrus), Bolt makes the surprising discovery that his TV super powers don't work in the real world. He is joined in his adventure by a jaded, abandoned housecat named Mittens (Susie Essman) and a TV-obsessed hamster in a plastic ball named Rhino.

Bolt was initially developed by *Lilo & Stitch* director Chris Sanders under the ti-

tle American Dog. When Disney acquired Pixar, Lasseter took the reigns of Walt Disney Feature Animation and saw fit to re-tool a number of projects in the works.

Due to creative differences, Sanders was removed from the film and replaced by first-time directors Howard and Williams. Howard served as an animator on the Disney pics *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *Lilo & Stitch* and *Brother Bear*, and is directing the studio's upcoming toon *Rapunzel* with writer Nathan Greno (*Meet the Robinsons*). Williams previously contributed to the stories for *Mulan*, *The Emperor's New Groove* and *Chicken Little*, and directed Disney's new animated short, *Glago's Guest*. He and



Byron Howard



Chris Williams

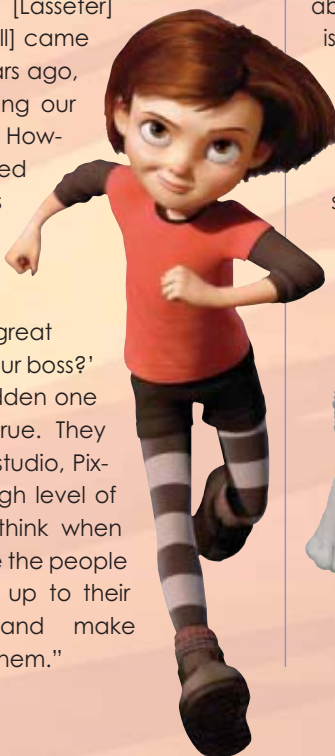


Imitations of a Dog's Life: High on the list of priorities for *Bolt*'s co-directors Byron Howard and Chris Williams and art director Paul Felix was making sure the environments had a soft, lived-in quality in contrast to the plastic-y visuals of some other CG-animated movies.



Dan Fogelman (*Cars*) completely re-wrote the *Bolt* script, retaining only the concept of a Hollywood dog getting lost in the country.

"When John [Lasseter] and Ed [Catmull] came in a couple years ago, it was like getting our dream," says Howard. "We talked about situations like that jokingly in the studio, like 'Wouldn't it be great if Lasseter was our boss?' and all of a sudden one day it came true. They hold their own studio, Pixar, to such a high level of quality, and I think when they came here the people wanted to live up to their expectations and make John proud of them."



Williams says the new regime brought a fresh vibe to Disney, but notes that the change came with added stress. "Their mantra at Pixar, which John has talked about a lot, is director-driven movies, artist-driven movies and an artist-driven environment," he notes. "They say that and they definitely back it up. Ultimately, that doesn't make our jobs easier, it actually gives you more responsibility and more pressure, and you have to be responsible for what you create. It doesn't mean you can do whatever the heck you want. You have to present your stuff and take criticism, take notes and be able to defend your positions."



New Beginnings

Though not a

complete departure, *Bolt* does feel different from previous Disney films. Williams says he and Howard were given freedom to experiment with the formula and the aesthetics of the film. "We didn't want to feel like we were handcuffed to anything that people think is supposed to be Disney," he explains. "When you look at things like the backgrounds, we're sort of borrowing from classic Disney, but at the same time we had to make this movie unique and special. Certainly with Lasseter now being the boss, it felt like time for a rebirth, so I don't think we were restricted in any way."

The movie was completed in about a year and a half from the time Williams and Howard came on board, which is a pretty quick turn-around for a big studio effort. The filmmakers had to make sure every scene played well in the storyboard phase in order to save time on animation. As a result, according to Howard, almost everything they storyboarded ended up in the movie and very little

deleted footage exists for the DVD release.

"I think people were just so excited about this being the first John Lasseter Disney movie, the beginning of a new era, that everybody, no matter what challenge we threw at them, came back and said they could do it," Williams comments. "When you have people who are willing to work late and to give everything they've got, suddenly the schedule doesn't seem as much like a handcuff."

Bolt begins with the movie's biggest action sequence, an all-out romp involving a desperate race through the streets of San Francisco that involves missiles, exploding helicopters, tanks and feats of super-canine strength executed by its title character. There are plenty more thrills to be had throughout the film, but as the story shifts from Bolt's TV world to the real world, the emphasis falls more on the relationships between characters.

"The thing we play with throughout the movie is the issue of trust, and it actually surprised us, once we started getting the animation in and getting the music taken care of, how much you feel about this relationship that develops between Mittens and Bolt," Howard explains.

Staying Away from Plastic

Howard notes that early in the film's development art director Paul Felix sought to take the edge off of the CG world and keep it from looking too perfect and plastic. "We knew that if we had a character who had to learn about the real world, it had to be this welcoming, lived-in environment. Paul and his team found a way to map brushstrokes onto the edges of objects and that in combination with taking the detail out of shadow areas gives the film a very soft and beautiful look that's easier to look at. The light and the cinematography they got into the film is pretty extraordinary as well."

Bolt may get top billing, but the movie's scene-stealer is Rhino the hamster. The character is voiced by Mark Walton, a story artist who provided the voice for

scratch tracks and did such a good job that he ended up getting the gig. Clay Kaytis, the supervising animator on Rhino, says the character isn't very different from Mark himself. Both are big fan-boys with funny personalities and the same infectious giggle. But even with a human model to work from, the animators were

Building the features' three main characters, step by step.



presented with some unique challenges, a big one being the plastic ball Rhino travels in.

"It was a huge consideration and I was kind of scared of it at the start," Kaytis says of the transparent globe. "It was actually a separate element from Rhino, and at the start of [production] they asked us if we should count Rhino and

the ball as two separate characters. I said that it was basically one character because he interacts with the ball and is one with it. As soon as the software guys figured out how to calculate rolling it from one point to another, that was a huge relief but we still had to actually roll the ball and every time Rhino took a step we would have to counter the ball and balance it underneath him. It was a constant kind of follow-up thing, a bit like you would do overlap of a character's hair. It was always overlap of the ball and making sure it was in contact with the ground. It was a lot of work to get his feet in there. None of it was automatic, except for the actual rolling. Everything else was up to us."

Another big hurdle for Kaytis and crew was working with a character that was nearly as rolly-polly as his mode of transportation. "It's very difficult for rigging to make a fat, little guy who maintains his volume all the time," he explains. "I worked with John Park, who worked out the quadruped version of Rhino, and then with another rigger named Hidetaka Yosumi, who helped me get Rhino to act on two legs. It was a very complicated rig in those terms because walking on four legs and walking on two legs are very different shapes, so we did a lot of technical things under the hood to make him transition between the two. I'd say it was the most complicated rig I've ever used, but, in the end, it had everything it needed and, once we got the hang of it, was really fun to animate."

Kaytis, who has been with Disney since 1994, says *Bolt* represents a huge jump for Disney animation, but it also goes back to its roots with a return to simplicity in posing, staging and dialogue. "I don't think it feels overdone," he says. "A lot of it came from Byron's direction of the animation, but it involved just pulling back and finding the essence of what all these scenes were all about. For me, that was really refreshing because it simplifies the presentation and makes a stronger statement overall."

Williams and Howard say the best thing

about making the movie was finding themselves in the middle of so much positive energy. Through the demanding days and late nights, there was no complaining because everyone felt that they

were working on something special. We'll see if moviegoers also find the film special as it rolls out around the world. The 3-D alone should make for one dog-gone good time at the movies. ■

Disney's *Bolt* is currently playing in U.S. theaters. It continues its international rollout in the next two months and opens in the U.K. and France in February.

Things Should Move As They Look!

Bolt's supervising animator looks back at the labor-intensive journey and the principles behind the movie's crisp visuals.
by Doug Bennett

Animating a feature film like *Bolt* is a massive undertaking. With over 1,300 shots, each averaging more than five feet, the amount of work that needs to be completed is daunting.

But of course every journey begins with the first step, and for us that first step was establishing the style of animation in the film. For this, the first stop is always the directors. Chris Williams is primarily a story artist and, as such, had very strong opinions about the emotional tenor of each shot and the story it needed to tell. Byron Howard is a story artist, but also an Annie-nominated animator who was able to get down to a nuts-and-bolts level with the animators and speak our language. Together, the two directors provided a solid structure on which we could build the character performances, and the key ideas we would all come back to were naturalism, sincerity and appeal.

Naturalism should not be mistaken for realism. One John Lasseter mantra is "truth in materials"—put simply, things should move as they look. Although there are elements of the

animating. We learned about bone structure, musculature, gaits and ranges of movement. We also studied behaviors, body language and facial expressions. We did all this not to mimic live-action dogs, cats and hamsters, but to build a muscle memory of realism in every animator so we could caricature movement and expression effectively. It was only then that we began to explore acting performances in the animals—how much "doggie-ness" did we want? How much "human" felt right? These decisions were made in dailies when we started to see the first tests come through. It became apparent to the room very quickly what felt comfortable and what felt too pushed.

Animal Instincts

The challenge of delivering a sincere performance lay in letting the story shine through. As animators, we always try to plus what we are given in the boards, and often this results in the movie becoming better in ways that the directors had not expected. However, the same instinct can lead to a character overacting,

hamming or stepping on a moment that is best left to the audience to put together themselves. On *Bolt*, it was important to Byron and Chris that the animators pulled back, reduced the broad cartoon acting that we felt was clichéd and concentrated more on revealing inner thought through subtlety. John Travolta has a wonderful inherent honesty in his voice, and that helped us

find *Bolt's* belief in what he was saying. As the director of *Bolt's* TV action show says, "If the dog believes it, the audience believes it!"

Perhaps the most elusive of the qualities we strived for was appeal. What is it? Most of us know it when we see it, and we can certainly tell when it is lacking, but few can articulate exactly what it is that gives a character appeal. Is it the design? Is it the posing? The tim-

ing? The answer, of course, draws from all of these areas and more. Every artist that works in CG knows how the graphic nuance of character design can change in the journey from paper to geometry. It's an inevitability of bringing an idea from one medium to another; it requires a reexamination and overhaul. It was no different for the character *Bolt*: After animating two or three sequences of the movie, we realized that some intangible attribute of our lead character was lacking. He wasn't the dog he needed to be. For ideas, we looked primarily to *Lady and the Tramp*, a masterwork in solid, accessible animal design—the brow ridges,



the pliability of the muzzles, the relationships between the major facial landmarks and the overall body proportions. A team of animators, riggers, modelers and look development artists worked intensively to remake *Bolt*. When we went back and reanimated the first sequences with the improved character, the difference was stunning.

The animators who contributed to *Bolt* are proud of their work in the film—and they should be! We worked through a challenging schedule and an even more challenging mandate to make the best CG Disney film to date. I feel that with each movie we make at Disney we gain confidence and try to outdo what we did before. For the animation department, that means learning from the masters of our craft, past and present, and building a studio culture of honesty and collaboration. ■

Doug Bennett was the animation supervisor on *Bolt*. He has worked as an animator on numerous features including *FernGully: The Last Rainforest*, *Asterix in America*, *Tarzan*, *Fantasia 2000*, *Dinosaur*, *Treasure Planet* and *Chicken Little*.



characters that could be perceived as photoreal, like *Bolt's* fur, irises, or the translucence of his ears, the designs are still caricatures. They are still anthropomorphic. And therefore, they must move and behave with elements of realism, but also with exaggeration and entertainment.

Before we started shot production, the animation crew studied the animals we would be



Gary Ross



Evgeni Tomov



Sam Fell

A Fairy Tale Ending for *Despereaux*?

Despite a rocky production history, Kate DiCamillo's award-winning tale becomes a subtly acted and delicately animated holiday feature.

by Barbara Robertson

Once upon a time, animated features created with computer graphics told stories with good characters and bad characters that performed slapstick comedy, told gags and were, well, cartoons. Usually these characters, as brightly colored as a box of crayons, lived in a perfectly focused world.

But in the kingdom of Universal Pictures, a very small mouse with very big ears has scampered into another form of CG animation, a complex story simply performed in a soft and tactile world.

In its original form, the Newberry Medal award-winning story by Kate DiCamillo is one of darkness and light, of mistakes and accidents, and of unlikely heroes that long for something beyond

their reach. DiCamillo divided the story into four books: The first centers on Despereaux, the untimid mouse with large ears who falls in love with a princess. The second focuses on Chiaroscuro (Roscu-ro, for short), a light-loving rat, while the

third centers on Miggery Sow, a slow-witted girl who dreams of becoming a princess. The fourth book weaves the stories told by these nonconformists into a fairy-tale ending.

To entwine the separate stories, *The Tale of Despereaux* writer/producer Gary Ross knitted the four books into one screenplay to which he brought his expertise as a live-action writer and director. Ross received Best Picture and Best Writing Oscar nominations in 2004 for *Seabiscuit*, which he produced and directed, as well as nominations for the *Dave* and *Big* screenplays. He also directed and produced *Pleasantville*.

Production designer Evgeni Tomov gave the film its painterly feel. "The story is



If All Started with a Mouse: After a rocky start, Universal's *The Tale of Despereaux* fell into the hands of talented co-directors Sam Fell and Rob Stevenhagen. The stylish CG-animated pic is the first big project produced by London-based Framestore CFC's feature animation division.



quite dark and organic," Tomov says. "I wanted to give the audience an immersive, atmospheric feel with rich, soft lighting, and to subject the characters to the same lighting as the environment. I deliberately pushed toward losing and hiding detail." Visual effects supervisor Barry Armour led the team of RenderMan shader writers who developed the film's difficult soft, diffuse lighting.

For lighting inspiration, Tomov looked toward 15th and 16th century Flemish painters, and he visited such cities as Amsterdam and Bruges, Belgium for environmental cues.

Tomov was previously production designer for *The Triplets of Belleville*, and at the beginning of this project, he worked with Sylvain Chomet, the *Triplets* director, as he had for previous Chomet films. When Chomet left the *Despereaux* project to work on his own 2D movie (*The Illusionist*), Tomov stayed behind. "I wanted to discover the 3D world," he says.

Tomov's production designs complemented Ross's multifaceted script. "Gary's script is unusual," says director Sam Fell, who joined director Robert Stevenhagen on the project after finishing DreamWorks' *Flushed Away*. "It isn't a three-act play. It's about four characters

"At first, people from cartoon animation were doing zany broad acting, but it didn't work with the designs or the story. The designs are stylized, but there's also an element of realism. And, the look is so sophisticated, gentle and soft. The animation style had to fit all that. We had to get everybody to calm down."

— *Despereaux* co-director Sam Fell

and how their stories weave together. We all realized it was as if we were going back to the old Disney days. We were telling a fairy tale."

Yet it was an ambitious fairy tale with a broad scope. "Gary [Ross] is a live-action person, so he has no notion about what's difficult and what's not in animation," Fell says. "He pushed us to do things we ordinarily wouldn't do."

Layout artist Brad Blackburn worked with Ross to design camera moves and lighting schemes from the script before storyboarding, making it possible for the storyboard artists to concentrate primarily on the acting.

Each of the characters lives in his or her carefully designed and detailed world. *Despereaux's* (Matthew Broderick) mouse world is tidy—like Switzerland, Tomov says—and his family is cautious, but he, of course, isn't. To create Roscuro's (Dustin Hoffman) chaotic rat world down in the

sewer Tomov looked toward Hieronymus Bosch and the decadence of the Roman Empire. He based the human world of Dor, which includes the royal family's castle where the delicate Princess Pea (Emma Watson) lives, and the rougher Mig's (Tracey Ullman) peasant world, on a Flemish aesthetic. The film also showcases the voice talents of Christopher Lloyd, Kevin Kline, Robbie Coltrane, William H. Macy and Stanley Tucci, with Sigourney Weaver narrating.

Animation supervisor Gabriele Zuccherli worked with Tim Watts and other animators on the team to refine Chomet's early character designs and Tomov's work on the character designs, as well. "Once Sylvain [Chomet] was no longer on the project, we restarted the whole design process," says Tomov. "I didn't revise the aesthetic, but the characters needed to feel closer to the new directors, so we restarted from scratch in mid-2006."



The resulting character designs and the environment affected the style of animation. "At first, people from cartoon animation were doing zany broad acting, but it didn't work with the designs or the story," Fell says. "The designs are stylized, but there's also an element of realism. And, the look is so sophisticated, gentle and soft. The animation style had to fit all that. We had to get everybody to calm down."

Adds Stevenhagen, "We needed a subtle approach in the animation to make the characters believable. We had to understate the performances."

As he had done for *Flushed Away*, Fell created a bio for each character with arcs and diagrams to show range of movement. "We had a little bible so when everybody started, I could give them a talk about their character," he says. "We tried to treat the characters as actors. It's quite tricky work, this, and not easy to do."

Framestore Feature Animation handled the production with Zucchelli dividing the



70 animators into eight teams. Six teams worked on sequences, one team concentrated on crowds using proprietary systems for small groups and Massive for larger crowds, and the eighth team made sure everything was ready to move on into lighting and rendering. Within the teams, Zucchelli cast animators with an eye toward their skills, assigning some, for example, to delicate moments, some to ac-

tion sequences and others to comedy.

All the characters are bipedal; they don't behave like animals. The animators created the performances using custom rigs developed at Framestore in Maya. For the facial rigs, a combination of blend shapes, sculpts, deformers, lattices and special rigs gave the animators a choice of modules. For example, "The fur in most cases is fairly long," Zucchelli says. "If it moves strangely, it really shows mistakes, so we had a way to view the rigs with and without fur." Similarly, a special animation rig for the eyes let animators place a fake iris and pupil that approximated how the eyes would look

after lighting and rendering.

Zucchelli had the animators film themselves acting out their shots before working on characters in Maya. "We'd review their films with the directors," he says. "We might tell the animators to go for the beginning from this take and the end of that take. That cut out all the bad ideas."

"It was a real challenge for us," he adds. "Most animators collect tricks and skills and devices to create an effect in a shot. We tried to scrap all that and get to the root of good performances. This is not slapstick comedy. We tried to be very subtle and we found that it actually added a lot of intensity. I don't think this subtlety has been tried to this extent in an animated movie. That's why we all worked on it and why we love it. There was no cynicism on this film."

A feature film with subtle animation in a soft and tactile world? Now that's the kind of fairy-tale ending we can all enjoy! ■

Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in CG animation and visual effects.

Universal's *The Tale of Despereaux* unfolds in U.S. theaters on December 19.

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Missing Lynx Spotted in Spain

Produced by Antonio Banderas, a new Spanish CG-animated feature showcases the country's native animals and natural environment. *by Ramin Zahed*

Fans of DreamWorks Animation's *Shrek* movies will always associate Spanish actor Antonio Banderas with his delightful depiction of the ogre's pal, Puss in Boots. However, Banderas is also pursuing a side venture as a producer of animated features on his own. This holiday season, filmgoers in Spain will be able to see his new movie, *The Missing Lynx* (*El Lince Perdido*), which is co-directed by veteran animators Raul Garcia and Manuel Sicilia. The CG-animated family movie is the first project from Kador Moon, a new label created by Banderas's Malaga, Spain-based outfit Green Moon and Granada's Kador Graphics. Kador Moon plans to make five animated features in the next 10 years.

"I was very familiar with animation before, due to my relationship with

DreamWorks and the *Shrek* franchise, and I always wondered why we didn't make in Spain the kind of animated films with a heart and humor for family audiences," noted Banderas prior to a presentation of the film at the recent American Film Market in Los Angeles. "Then one day, literally, [director] Raul Garcia came to my house and showed me what he and Manuel Sicilia were doing at Kador Graphics, and I saw the film's potential. I was very surprised by the quality of the work and the greatness of the story. I was hooked and decided that I wanted to be part of the project. We got together and figured out a way to collaborate and that brainstorm resulted in a new animation studio called Kador Moon—derived from Kador Graphics, their company, and Green Moon, my pro-

duction company."

The Missing Lynx centers on a group of animals (Felix the lynx, Gus the chameleon, Astarte the hawk, Rupert the mole and Beety the goat) who have to escape an evil hunter's scheme to capture them and deliver them to a mad millionaire's Noah's Ark. The film's director, Raul Garcia, is an animation veteran, who has worked on features such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, *Hercules* and *Tarzan*. His 2005 short *The Tell-Tale Heart* was a festival favorite.

Garcia tells us that he grew up watching the adventures of Yogi Bear on TV. "I knew perfectly that Yogi lived in a beautiful natural park with geysers called Yellowstone. Talking with my partner Manuel Sicilia, co-writer and director of the film, we realized that kids in Spain knew more about the Polar bear, the African lion and the Antarctic penguin than their own local fauna, and somehow, the concept of



Raul Garcia



Manuel Sicilia

working with Spanish lynxes, Iberian goats and chameleons triggered something in us!"

The Plains in Spain

Working with local environmental groups in Andalucia, Garcia and Sicilia fleshed out the concept and wrote the movie with a strong sense of structure and character arcs. "We put as much attention to the story as if the film would have been shot in live action with real actors. We wrote the film with one thought in our minds; respect for the audience and an engaging story."

The seed money for the project came from the environmental council of the local Andalucian government in Spain, and the producers financed the movie using film funds from Spain, sponsorships, pre-sales in film markets like Berlinale, Cannes and the AFM and indie venues such as bank loans and profits from the studio's commercials arm. "We also went to the Cartoon Movie Forum in Potsdam last year and generated enough interest in the film to close some more territories. It has been an incredible adventure as independent filmmaking doesn't have the cushion of a firm investor behind to be able to secure the production funds beforehand. Along the way, Antonio Banderas saw the film and decided to join forces with us and became a partner in our new company."

According to Garcia, the film was produced by a small crew of 40 individuals based at Kandor Graphics in Granada. "There were only 12 animators at crunch time, but during the three years of production we managed to work with eight or nine. The trick is that everybody works in every aspect of the film, so the animator's help with the animatics, riggers help with modeling, and the lighting department doubles as the texture department. Everybody wears

more than one hat."

The Kandor team worked mostly with 3ds Max for modeling and animation and developed specific tools and plug-ins for the software. The render was done with V-Ray, while Avid systems were used to edit the project. Garcia credits his directing partner Sicilia for helping maintain the production and managing the studio at the same time. "What was easy to handle in the pre-production and animatics became a nightmare once we started the animation process, so instead of using the Internet and FTP sites, I ended up spending a great deal of time in Granada. Without Manuel's amazing contributions, *The Missing Lynx* would never have existed."

A New Spanish Wave

Garcia says he's quite pleased with the final quality of the animation and he hopes to help bring about a more cohe-

was chosen among several pitches made by the studio crew itself. It will be a stereoscopic film and it will help to develop the tools for the next feature *Go-leor* [a medieval action-adventure tale] directed by Manuel Sicilia and shot completely in stereoscopic 3-D. Meanwhile I am preparing *Edgar Allan Poe's Extraordinary Tales*, a horror feature film based on Poe's stories in the style of my short, *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The first story in production will be *The Fall of the House of Usher*, voiced by Christopher Lee."

Garcia, who has a real passion for Disney classics and old Warner Bros. shorts, believes that animation is an open door to the imagination. "It's my life, my passion and my hobby," he notes. "We animators are pioneers, explorers and keepers of an old art form. We care for each other, have fun doing what we love to do and we have the chance to keep alive our inner child regardless of our physical age. Animation is the best



sive push for animated ventures in Spain. "There's an amazing pool of talented animators in Spain," he notes. "The problem is that we don't have a real animation industry in Spain, or at least continuity in the production of the features. With Kandor Moon, we are working towards a slate of projects so we can keep the creative core together and develop and nurture new talent."

Next up for Kandor Moon is a shorts program, which will begin with Javier Recio's *Death and the Maiden*. "The film

toy train I ever played with. Sometimes you get a wooden one, sometimes an electric one, sometimes a spiffy digital one ... but it's still a toy train and I'm still allowed to play with it. What else can I ask for?" ■

The Missing Lynx is co-produced by Kandor Moon, YaYa! Films and Perro Verde and will be released in Spain by Aurum on Dec. 26. International rights are handled by 6 Sales. For more info, visit www.themissinglynx-movie.com.

Delgo Finally Sees the Light

Director Marc Adler describes the multi-year journey behind his indie CG-animated epic. *by Mercedes Milligan*

This holiday season, audiences will get a rare treat: A fully indie, theatrically released CG feature, courtesy of Atlanta-based Fathom Studios. However, it's Marc F. Adler and his dedicated crew that feel like kids on Christmas: After nearly 10 years, tons of trial and error and countless nights and weekends spent at the drawing table, the \$40 million fantasy adventure *Delgo* is finally ready to make it to the big screen.

Co-directed by Adler and Jason F. Maurer, the film follows Delgo (Freddie Prinze Jr.), a strong-headed teen in a galaxy far away, as he and his cowardly best friend, Filo (Chris Kattan), stumble into an adventure that will unite two warring cultures and bring peace to the fantastical world they inhabit. The plot also involves a wicked leader (voiced by the late Anne Bancroft), an unlikely love interest (Jennifer Love Hewitt) and a perilous quest to reveal a hidden threat.

The journey to complete *Delgo* was equally daunting. Fathom Studios evolved out of Internet service company Macquarium Intelligent Communications to handle effects and animation for clients and to produce station packages and commercials. Adler had wanted to create animated features from a young age, and recognizing the talent and resources the studio had on-hand, he realized the time had come. "In 1996, we decided, 'We want to make an animated feature.' There's a big jump from wanting to do it and toying around with it to actually committing to it," the newly minted director tells us.

Fathom spent four years developing art, writing treatments and reaching out to Hollywood. "We talked to some studios to see if they would trust a group of people from nowhere near Hollywood who had never done a film before ... meanwhile we were actually having to earn money!" In between client projects, the team made time to meet up over pizza to sketch and pound out story elements (Adler won't tell whether any of the ideas their waiter pitched made it into the film).

A turning point came in 2000, when Adler's younger cousin, with whom he'd shared a passion for art and filmmaking, lost a tragic battle with cancer. "I'd been toiling over this thing for four years, and until you really make the commitment to take that huge step, you're not going to do anything," Adler explains. "So, I made the personal commitment, I asked for the commitment of some staff members—Warren Grubb, who's my animation director, and my co-director Jason Maurer—and we all vowed that no matter what it took, no matter how long it took, we were going to make this thing happen." An international team of artists was assembled, many of whom worked remotely, and Adler, Maurer and writer Scott Bear got to work on turning four years of tinkering into a theater-ready script.

Building the Back-Story

The Fathom crew had no misconceptions about their rookie status, so several years went in to testing and developing *Delgo*. "It was a very interesting dynamic, because we were studying all the other animated films, yet what we were hearing from [our test readers] was it had to be deeper, they wanted more," Adler observes. "So, we had a prologue to give a back-story and the detail of these cultures. Moving forward, you have a better understanding of who they are and where they came from."

Few would argue with the casting choices, which took three years to complete. In addition to the core cast, the film features the voices of Val Kilmer, Malcolm McDowell, Eric Idle, Burt Reynolds, Michael Clarke Duncan and Kelly Ripa (among others). Once assembled, cast and crew embarked on a five-year journey to complete the film.

From the start, the team shared a passion for creating something different. "We were able to attract people to the project based on the story, based on the look being so unique—because it's so different from anything else that you've seen, which is why



An Epic Undertaking: Produced, co-written and directed by Marc F. Adler, the \$40 million feature *Delgo* is a sci-fi fantasy adventure about a young hero (voiced by Freddie Prinze, Jr.), a kidnapped princess (Jennifer Love Hewitt) and the clash of two cultures in a faraway world.

Hollywood was so not ready to take the leap," says Adler, "Hollywood has a formula: Known story, talking animals, comedy. And those animals have to be big-eyed, cute, furry creatures. So, we went against the grain on every one of those aspects."

Delgo's highly developed worlds-within-a-world are distinctive, yet unified by a rich palette and a diverse array of unique creatures; the sky-bound Nohrin travel on the backs of dragon-like "razorwings," while the Lockni mount large two-legged reptiles. The differences between the two cultures are established in the characters' appearance as well as the architecture and functionality of the worlds they inhabit, which are simultaneously next-door and light years apart.

"From an art perspective, [art director Mark Jackson] has an intriguing background in anthropology and architecture ... so he's just a sponge for cultural information," says Adler. "He looks at everything from Celtic artifacts to tribes in Africa—all of it, and they all are kind of baked into this concept. We have two races in this film; one of them is this tribal type of people—they're people of the earth and they understand the magic of the land; whereas the other culture is an aristocracy ... they fly, so they're more svelte."

However, to make the film's budding



romance believable, it was important to keep the two species parallel: "We couldn't have just crazy alien races—especially when we're going to have two of them mate, basically," he jokes. Though there's no funny business on-screen, the writers have plotted out future stories about the couple's life together.

Maya to the Rescue

Adding to the film's unique look, Fathom used true blacks for deep shadows, steering clear of the soft blue tones of most CG kids' flicks. Plus, the entire production was accomplished in Autodesk's Maya. Literally. "For cost reasons, we actually used the Maya renderer—I don't think any movie's ever been done with Maya renderer," Adler laughs.

Another tech innovation of the production was the "digital dailies" system the programming gurus at Macquerium were able to build to facilitate an international workflow. The web-based system allowed the artists to post their daily work for review. "Originally, we were using that for feedback from myself and my animation director, lighting director and co-director," explains Adler, who was often on the road during production, "Then, we moved on to collaboration

"We were able to attract people to the project based on the story and the look being so unique—because it's so different from anything else that you've seen, which is why Hollywood was so not ready to take the leap."

—Marc Adler, director of *Delgo*



with everyone else on staff. And then we pumped it out to the world for anyone to comment and see. Everything we had on a daily basis we exposed. The good, the bad and the ugly."

Once the dailies were made public on the *Delgo* site, interest in the film quickly picked up. "We were getting schools and people in the animation trade, people who were just lovers of fantasy from all over the world—half a million people were coming to the site through production, every month, just to see the dailies. So, we got a lot of interest from publications ... Because while most studios are closing doors and locking them and throwing away the key because of piracy, we were doing the exact opposite."

Since its completion, *Delgo* has played at major toon festivals such as Annecy, SICAF and Anima Mundi, where it took home the Best New Feature prize, which is awarded by

audience vote. Adler was most pleased to have achieved his goal of creating a film that was universally accessible, relying on time-tested physical comedy and story-centric humor instead of pop culture references, and a moral message about overlooking differences.

As for the future of *Delgo* and its U.S. release, Adler is pragmatic: "It would be great if it's commercially successful because that means we can do more of them. But if you're an animator out there and you have a dream of doing something: Pursue the passion, go for it, and there will be nothing that will make you happier." ■

Freestyle Releasing opens *Delgo* Dec. 12 in U.S. theaters. The feature will be preceded by Fathom's new short, *Chroma Chameleon*. For more info, visit www.delgo.com.

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Animation Magazine's Oscar Watch [part 2 of 4]

If Toons Took Over All the Categories

by Ramin Zahed

In last month's special Oscar Preview issue, we took a look at the top contenders that were in the running for the Best Animated Feature Academy Awards. Although we were hoping that more than 15 movies would qualify in the race (and increase the number of nominees to five in the big category) only 14 titles made the cut this year. By now, we've all seen numerous articles trying to predict which films will be the final three contenders when the list is announced in the early morning on Thursday, January 22.

Those who make a habit of predicting the award season champs have noted that this year's big money is on WALL•E, Kung Fu Panda and Waltz with Bashir—but it will be certainly more exciting if one of the other titles (*The Tale of Despereaux*, *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears A Who!*, *Bolt*, *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, *Delgo*, *Igor*, *Fly Me to the Moon*, *Dragon Hunters* or *\$9.99*, for example) land a nomination or two.

According to some experts, the fact that there is an animation category makes it more difficult for a movie like WALL•E to nab a Best Picture nomination. However, many of us animation fans have no problem seeing the movie about the lovelorn robot competing with live-action heavyweights such as *Milk*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *Revolutionary Road*. We'd like to see any of those "serious" dramas captivate the audience without using dialogue in their first hours.

All of this brings us to another subject we like to consider during awards season: Wouldn't it be fantastic if toons took over all the other categories?

Here are some of the people we'd love to see recognized with their live-action counterparts during award season!

Best Song: It's become an Oscar night tradition to see those catchy numbers from animated features performed in the Best Song category.

Looking back at the last decade, we've seen a wide range of contenders from animated movies: *The Prince of Egypt*, *Quest for Camelot*, *South Park: Bigger Longer & Uncut*, *Toy Story 2*, *The Emperor's New Groove*, *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*, *The Triplets of Belleville*, *The Polar Express*, *Cars* and *Enchanted* all received nominations for their songs, and Disney's *Tarzan* (Phil Collins' "You'll Be in My Heart") and *Monsters, Inc.* (Randy Newman's "If I Didn't Have You") took home the golden statuette in 2000 and 2002.

Among this year's animated features, we know that many have already fallen in love with Peter Gabriel's "Down to Earth" from WALL•E, Jenny Lewis'

"Barking at the Moon" and Miley Cyrus' "I Thought I Lost You" from *Bolt* and "The Travelling Song" by Hans Zimmer and will.i.am from *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*. Sorry kids, but the Carl Douglas tune "Kung Fu Fighting" (from *Kung Fu Panda*) doesn't qualify since it



Waltz with Bashir



Kung Fu Panda



Sound Advice: WALL•E's character voice designer/sound designer and editor Ben Burtt and writer/director Andrew Stanton are two of this year's top award contenders

Voice of the Underdog:
John Travolta voices Bolt
in Disney's
beautifully animated
family movie.



came out in 1974.

Best Score: The competition gets much more interesting when you include Thomas Newman's score for *WALL•E*, Hans Zimmer's soundtrack for *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, John Powell's stirring scores for *Bolt* and *Horton Hears A Who!* and Patrick Doyle's under-appreciated music for *Igor*. Let's not forget that many critics have already praised the amazing work that Max Richter delivered on *Waltz with Bashir*. It doesn't get any more eclectic than that!

Best Cinematography: We're sure many of the Academy voters will be oo-ing and aahing about Baz Luhrmann's majestic landscapes in *Australia*, but we're hoping they'll think outside the box and single out the work that seven time Oscar nominee Roger Deakins did on Pixar's *WALL•E*. How about hearing it for



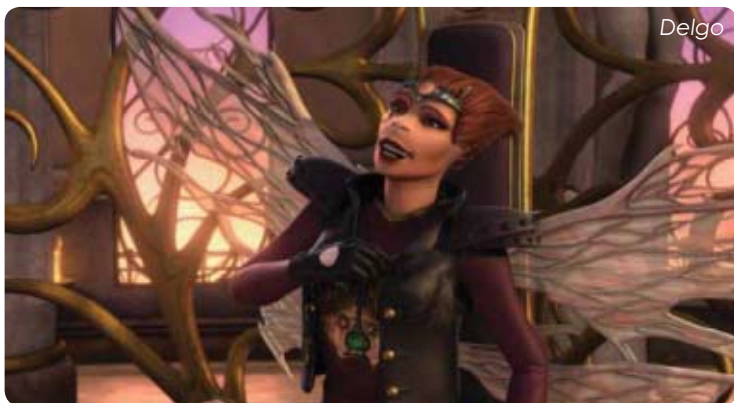
\$9.99

the amazing African vistas of *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, courtesy of director of photography Guillermo Navarro.

Sound Categories: There are only two words we just have to mention in this race: Ben Burtt! With two Academy Awards and two Special Achievement Awards for his work on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Wars*, Burtt did the unimaginable: He pulled us into the heart and soul of a digital robot with his peerless mastery of aural technology. Mr. Burtt, you



The Tale of Despereaux



Delgo

made us hear the future—and it sounds a lot friendlier because of you!

Best Ensemble Cast: We've been very fortunate to hear many talented men and women performing in the lucrative field of animated features this year. It saddened us to lose Anne Bancroft and Bernie Mac, but we can still hear their voices in *Delgo* and *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*. A few of the star turns that entertained and moved us in 2008: Carol Burnett, Jim Carrey and Steve Carell all did excellent work in *Horton Hears A Who!* Jack Black and Dustin Hoffman played very well together in *Kung Fu Panda*, and Sigourney Weaver created a chilling vocal for the ship's computer in *WALL•E*.

We also loved a low-key John Travolta who completely disappeared in his role as the heroic dog in *Bolt*, alongside Susie Essman and Mark Walton (who played his best pals Mittens and Rhino). And let's not forget that the stellar ensemble cast of *The Tale of Despereaux* showcases the vocal talents of Matthew Broderick, Christopher Lloyd (also in *Delgo*), Dustin Hoffman, Sigourney Weaver (she's had a busy year!), Robbie Coltrane, Emma Watson, Frank Langella, William H. Macy, Kevin Kline and Tracey Ullman.

Best Costume and Art Direction: Notice how the classic fairy tale characters in *Despereaux* look like they've jumped straight out of a painting by Flemish master Jan van Eyck. Check out the threads worn by the various otherworldly characters in *Delgo* or the wonderful Asian costumes on the warriors in *Kung Fu Panda*. Who could ignore the painstakingly crafted, tactile look of \$9.99's stop-motion world? How about the important art design and stylistic choices made in *Waltz with Bashir*? In our animation parallel universe, all of these achievements are in the running for the top prizes. Thanks to the efforts of Antran Manoogian and the hard-working team at ASIFA-Hollywood, we'll always have the Annie Awards. Mark your calendars for Jan. 30 at UCLA's Royce Hall. That's when the good people of Toon Town will show all the live-action folks how it's really done. ■

Writer's Perspective

The Stilletos Stay in the Picture

by Rob Moreland

"So, Rob, what do you think?" The voice belonged to Sigourney Weaver. She was on the phone. My phone. Also heard were the voices of a producer and director in Germany, and another producer in Los Angeles. The heavy breathing on the line was suspended, waiting for me to answer.

I couldn't answer. I couldn't believe that Sigourney Weaver wanted to hear my opinion, but there it was. I'd written a part that she liked, that of Frieda in the movie *Happily N'Ever After*. In my original script, Frieda was not just Cinderella's stepmom but also a bored housewife experiencing a midlife crisis. She'd once dated the Wizard of fairy tale land, but then, the Wizard (played by George Carlin) had also quietly dallied with a few princesses. He'd taken Frieda to his condo in Ft. Lauderdale before breaking off the relationship, and now Frieda was feeling a mix of crankiness and ennui. The only diversion open to her was taking over the world.

That was my idea, anyway. Through a succession of storyboards, the firing of the director and replacing half the crew (which originally included many Disney veteran animators), the idea of Frieda had changed. No longer was she "funny evil," now she was "evil evil." Instead of her goofy Elaine May affect, she had stiletto heels. And a three-inch waist. And a choke collar. She looked like a cross between a Pussycat Doll and Scary Spice but she longer had any complexity as a character.

Sigourney refused to continue recording lines. Why should she? She'd signed on for one character, and here it had evolved into something ... well ... different.

"So ... Rob?"

That she was asking for my support in re-

directing the character was amazing to me. Part of me wanted to say, "Yes! We'll absolutely fix this character together." However, I'm not a director, and I'm not a producer. I'm an animation writer, primarily.

One of my best buddies is an internationally best-selling novelist. He sits at his desk and writes. No one edits him. When he's done, he's done. His words are read by millions of people. Of course, the public will never read a word that I write. Being an



Sigourney Weaver



animation writer is like playing that childhood game called telephone. You whisper your message to the next person, who whispers it to the next, and so on. Your message may be improved, it may be distorted, but it will never be exactly what you intended.

I knew the same would be true for the character of Frieda. Here Sigourney Weaver, one of the finest actors alive, had agreed to play a role that I created. Here she was, asking for my blessing and contribution to restore the character to my original vision for it. She'd even improved the character, by making truly thoughtful notes and suggestions.

I knew the character that I'd written, and that she loved, was not going to be in the movie. This, despite the fact that the director was visually talented, the producers were very smart and the board artists were superb. The L.A. producer was fiercely on my side. The funders of the movie from Germany had final say. The production just had a different idea evolved for that character, and that idea was not "funny evil." It was "evil evil." With 11-inch stilettos.

"So...?"

At such a moment, I thought of my wonderful lovely kids, sitting at the dinner table, in front of bowls filled with ... my pride. Could my kids eat my pride? Could I pay the bills with it? As an animation writer, I get paid modestly to write. However, I get paid bonuses on my movies, but only if I'm credited. No credit means no bonuses. The Writers Guild of America, of which I'm a proud member, had no jurisdiction.

Sigourney Weaver was giving me the chance to keep the movie going. I knew that, without her collaboration, financing would dry up. This was the make it or break it call. Hence the heavy breathing from the producers. You could almost hear a Euro coin drop.

Well, you probably know what I did. I said yes, I'd help restore the character to my original concept, even as I sensed that, based on my experience, it would result in only a marginal improvement. The new lines, like the old ones, would not make it into the movie.

Did I do the right thing? I'm not sure. My buddy the novelist reminds me that I chose to work in animation, a highly col-

laborative form of storytelling. I tell myself that animation writing is not about a product but process. I say it's not about the destination but the journey, which takes you to surprising places. And sometimes, when you get to that place, whether or not you like it, waiting for you is an "evil evil" bad guy with stiletto heels, aggressively wide hips and a big "Muah ha ha ha!" (added, of course, in ADR). ■

Rob Moreland is a producer and animation writer. His writing credits include *Space Chimps*, *Happily N'Ever After* and *Thunder Pig*. He was a creative consultant for the producer of *Shrek*.



Rob Moreland

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The Tale of Despereaux



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Metalocalypse – Season 2 [Turner, \$25.99]

Click on your lighters and get ready for an encore of Dethklok's hardcore, hard rocking mayhem on DVD. Brendan Small and Tommy Blacha's charming boys from the doom fortress around the corner (Nathan Explosion, Skwisgaar, Wartooth, Murderface and ... Pickles) will be assaulting our senses with a two disc, 20 episode set of their riff-filled adventures. Highlights of the Titmouse/William Street produced toon include "Dethdoubles," "Cleanzo," and "Dethgov," in which the band faces evil lookalikes, a DTing Dr. Rockso and Florida's gubernatorial election, respectively. Expect some awesome extras (but right now they're a secret)!

[Release date: Dec. 2]

Aqua Teen Hunger Force, Vol. 6 [Turner, \$26.99]

Another [adult swim] favorite returns to shelves this month. Yep, Matt Maiellaro and Dave Willis's not-so-super fast food heroes are still going strong—unfortunately for Carl and bomb

squads everywhere. This two discer features 13 episodes (including four never aired) and five wicked bonus bits like the 15-minute short *Terror Phone* starring voice actors Dana Snyder and Carey Means, plus a montage of all the comedic scenes and outtakes from the *ATHF Zombie Ninja Pro Am* videogame (as

Snyder noted at a Comic-Con briefing, "So you don't have to play through the sh*tty videogame,"). We are helpless to resist!

[Release date: Dec. 16]

Horton Hears A Who! [Fox, \$29.98]

This colorful adaptation of the Dr. Seuss classic from the toon gurus at Fox and Blue Sky delighted audiences in early '08, and makes its home entertainment debut just in time for holiday gatherings full of kids and kids at heart. Home audiences have a glut of choices: In addition to the standard widescreen single, shelves will be laden with jam-packed two-disc special

edition sets with digital copy in widescreen format (\$34.98) and on Blu-ray (\$39.99). The single features directors' commentary from Jimmy Hayward and Steve Martino as well as an Ice Age short titled *Surviving Sid*. The larger sets come with a Whoville's worth of additional bonuses: Commentary from stars Jim Carrey and Steve Carrell; development featurettes; 13 deleted scenes; animation tests with intro by Nick Bruno; an interactive game and a charming "Watch with a Who" option—plus much more.

[Release date: Dec. 9]

Fly Me to the Moon [Summit Ent., \$24.99]

The cosmos-bound bugs from nWave Pictures' 3-D summer flick are ready to blast off to your house this month. If you missed the action in theaters, now's the time to join tween flies Nat, I.Q. and Scooter as they sneak onto the Apollo 11 and become the first flies in space! Directed by



Ben Stassen, *Fly Me* boasts a star studded cast including Christopher Lloyd, Kelly Ripa, Nicollette Sheridan, Tim Curry, Adrienne Barbeau, Ed Begley Jr. and space race era hero Buzz Aldrin as himself. The wide-screen release comes with

two pairs of 3D glasses so you don't miss one bit of the lunar-bound action. Now that's something to buzz about!

[Release date: Dec. 2]

The Man Called Flintstone [Warner, \$19.98]

'66 vintage Hanna-Barbera musical spy spoof starring our favorite modern Stone Age family? Yabba-dabba yes, please! Originally slated for release in 2004, and made available for Canuck fans in '05,



Ho, Ho, Holy Moly!

Stuff your stockings with the latest DVD and Blu-ray releases.

by Mercedes Milligan

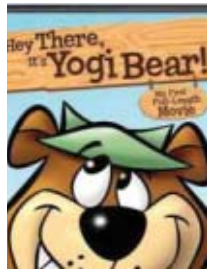
anxiously awaiting Yankees can finally get their hands on this beautifully remastered release of the original theatrical feature. Written and directed by Joseph Barbera and William Hanna, this 007 send up sees Fred Flintstone (voiced by Alan Reed) become an international caveman of mystery when he's recruited to replace a lookalike secret agent (Paul Frees). With his family and best pal Barney (Mel Blanc) in tow, Fred travels to Eurock to catch a nefarious villain—without letting anyone catch on to his secret mission! Action, adventure, musical numbers ... What more could you want?

[Release date: Dec. 2]

Hey There, It's Yogi Bear! [Warner, \$19.98]

Also out of the Hanna-Barbera vaults is 1964's *Hey There, It's Yogi Bear!*, the delightful feature length romp that's smarter than the av-e-rage TV special. This earlier theatrically released musical extravaganza was crafted by Barbera and Hanna, with Warner Bros. Cartoons storymeister Warren Foster augmenting the script team. In it, Yogi (Daws Butler) and Boo Boo (Don Messick) are shanghaied off to the San Diego Zoo by a frustrated Ranger Smith (Messick). Though they escape, in their absence Yogi's ursine sweetheart Cindy sets out to find him, only to be captured by a cruel circus crew, inciting Yogi and his little buddy to go on a cross country adventure to save Cindy and bring her home to Jellystone. And they say chivalry is dead.

[Release date: Dec. 2] ■



The Chronicles of Narnia Blu-ray Bundle

Exclusively on Amazon, Dec. 2: Two-disc HD sets of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian* can be yours for an ever-reducing special price from the web retailer (list: \$70.98).



The Samurai Critic's Best of '08

Nine DVD and Blu-ray gift ideas for anime fans

by Charles Solomon



Although iTunes and other on-line sources have become increasingly popular with otaku, there are still plenty of DVD titles that will earn you sincere thanks from the anime fans on your gift list.

Case Closed: Season 1 (FUNimation: \$49.98, 4 discs)

High school detective Jimmy Kudo commands powers of observation and deduction Nancy Drew might envy, but two thugs give him a poison that turns him into a little boy. Taking the name Conan Edogawa (from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Japanese mystery writer Ranpo Edogawa), he gets his former girlfriend Rachel and her thick-witted detective father to take him in. As Conan, Jimmy continues to solve baffling murder cases, but others get the credit.



Death Note Box Set 1 (VIZ: \$69.98, 5 discs)

High school star Light Yagami deplores the lack of justice in the world—until he finds the Death Note, a notebook dropped by a *Shinigami*, or God of Death. If anyone writes the name of a human in the book, that person dies minutes later. Light launches the ultimate vigilante campaign: He will rid the world of evil people and create his vision of a perfect society. But he meets his match in the eccentric, secretive detective known as L, and the two begin a deadly intellectual chess game. *Death Note* begins slowly, but improves as it progresses.



The Girl Who Leapt Through Time (Bandai Entertainment: \$29.98)

One of the big hits in Japan in 2006, *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* has been eagerly awaited in America. High school student Makoto discovers she can move through time and alter the past. But when she tries to improve the present, her efforts backfire, making school, friendship and romance more difficult. Director Mamoru Hosoda imbues the relationship Makoto shares with her best friends studious



Kosuke and class clown Chiaki with a depth and subtlety that elude American animators.

Naruto the Movie 3: Guardians of the Crescent Moon Kingdom (VIZ: \$29.98, 2 discs)

Naruto remains one of the most popular anime (and manga) properties in the world, and *Guardians of the Crescent Moon Kingdom*, the best of the three features, makes it clear why. The film showcases both the rambunctious energy of the series and the underlying warmth that keeps the élan from becoming obnoxious. Naruto and his friends Sakura and Rock Lee are assigned to guard



Michiru, the wealthy crown prince of the Moon Kingdom, and his spoiled son Hikaru. A typhoon and a revolt by a corrupt official enable Naruto to teach Hikaru about the importance of loyalty, friendship and bravery.

One Piece: Season 1, First Voyage (Uncut) (FUNimation: \$49.98, 2 discs)

Frog-faced Monkey D. Luffy has decided to become King of the Pirates by finding the lost treasure of Gold Roger. His kind heart attracts a crew of agreeable misfits, and his rubbery limbs—the result of eating the cursed “gum-gum fruit”—enable him to deliver formidable punches and kicks. The uncut edition from FUNimation restores the offbeat fun that was noticeably absent from the 2004 4Kids release. Creator Eiichiro Oda says *One Piece* is the story he wanted to read as a boy: Millions of others agree.



School Rumble: Season 2, Part 1 (FUNimation: \$59.98, two discs)

The “Second Semester” of this nutty high school romantic comedy begins where the first season ended, with the characters having learned nothing from their previous travails. Perky Tenma remains fixated on the clueless Karasuma; aspiring manga

artist Harima can't bring himself to declare his affection for Tenma. The filmmakers push their spoofs of other films and TV series to new levels of outrageous hilarity: A picnic morphs into a satire of Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*, and Harima takes Toshiro Mifune's role as the mysterious swordsman in a send-up of Kurosawa's samurai epics.



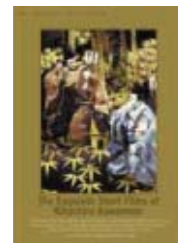
SOS! Tokyo Metro Explorers: The Next (Bandai Visual: \$64.95, Blu-Ray)

Katsuhiro Ôtomo (Akira) created the surprisingly playful manga on which *Tokyo Metro Explorers* is based. Four elementary school boys led by Ryuhei set out to find the lost treasure they believe is hidden under present day Tokyo. They discover a curious assortment of misfits and survivors in the tunnels and abandoned work sites beneath the city. Some unexpected plot twists give the film the feeling of a classic boys' adventure story. Director Shinji Takagi cleverly combines 3D trains and 2D maps of the city in the opening sequence.



The Exquisite Short Films of Kihachiro Kawamoto (1968-1979) (Kino Video: \$29.95) The Book of the Dead (Kino Video: \$29.95)

A former student of the great Jiri Trnka, Kihachiro Kawamoto draws on Kabuki, Noh, Bunraku and the traditional Japanese graphic arts to create his singularly elegant stop-motion films. The shorts in the *Exquisite* collection range from the farcical *The Breaking of Branches Is Forbidden to Dojoji Temple*, the dramatic tale of a woman transformed by lust. In Kawamoto's most recent film, *The Book of the Dead*, an aristocratic lady weaves a miraculous garment to clothe the figure she beheld in a vision. *Book of the Dead* can be seen as a summary of Kawamoto's previous work. ■



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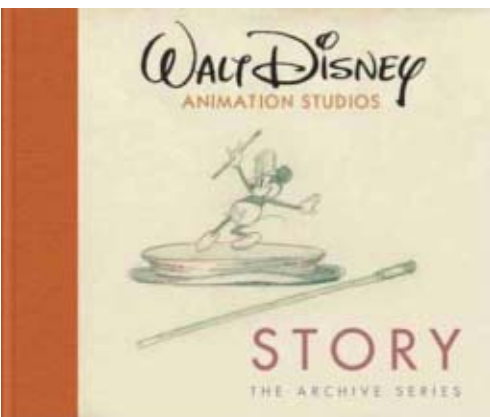
It's that time of the year again when we browse the toy stores, the book shops and our fave websites to make your holiday shopping a bit less stressful. Sure, it's great to give, but wouldn't it be fun to receive some of these great gifts as well!

Back in Time with Walt & Co.

We might be prejudiced, but if Santa was just going to bring us one gift this holiday season, it would have to be this lavish **Walt Disney Animation Studios The Archive Series: Story** book, which costs about \$50. This handsome 240-

page hardcover is one of those book/art scrapbook offerings that Disney Editions has been offering around the holidays each year. If you were lucky enough to receive the 2007 big, fat Mickey Mouse collection, you'll know what to expect from this year's volume. An intro by John Lasseter kicks off an illustrated journey through the studio's story development process. With artwork by the likes of Bill Peet, Don DeGradi, Roy Williams, Ub Iwerks, Burny Mattinson and Vance Gerry, the chapters walk us through Golden Age classics such as *Steamboat Willie*, *Snow*

White and the Seven Dwarfs, *Bambi* and *Pinocchio* through later efforts such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *101 Dalmatians*. The studio's preservationists have come up with some never-before-seen reproductions (presented in all their glory, with notes, flaws and even hole punches) that require white glove treatment. Nobody will ever want to see the slightest wrinkle or, god-forbid, a trace of a fingerprint on the pages of this beautiful object.



A Vigilante for All Seasons

We know a lot of fan-boys out there can't wait until Frank Miller's feature adaptation of Will Eisner's beloved comic book **The Spirit** arrives in select theaters in late December.



The team at Dark Horse Comics may have a few items that will keep die-hards happy until that date.

First up, there's **The Classic Spirit Mini-Bust**, which is based on original concept art by Eisner and created by sculptor Tony Cipriano. The 4.5" x 7.5" tall mini-bust comes with a Central City manhole cover and will set you back about \$70. Wait, there's more! You can also get a **Spirit Snow Globe** (\$79.99), **Spirit Light-Up Journal** (\$11.99), **Spirit Lunchbox** (\$14.99) or the 2006



DC Comics' *Batman/The Spirit*, in which the two graphic icons meet face to face (\$3.99). All of these hot items can be ordered at www.tfaw.com (Things from Another World website). Fighting for justice was never so consumer-driven.

Grip Pen Paradise

If you want to see the eyes of animator light up, just mention the name Wacom in conversation. The company's Cintiq family of interactive pen displays have a way of casting a spell on anyone who has experienced their precision and control. The newest additions to the family—the **Cintiq 12WX** (\$999) and the **Cintiq 20WSX** (\$1,999)—both deliver the smooth performance we've come to expect from Wacom's pen and LCD monitor technology. You don't have to know that the Cintiq Grip Pen features 1,024 levels of pressure sensitivity to love this slickly designed tool. If you're looking for something more economical (and more gen. population-friendly) there's always **Bamboo** (\$79) and **Bamboo Fun** (\$99), the outfit's new line of pen tables that plug into computers and allow users to jot notes by hand, mark up documents, make sketches and doodles and handwrite e-mail.



10 Must-Have DVDs of the Year

- Looney Tunes: Golden Collection, Vol. 6 (Warner Bros.)
- Walt Disney Treasures: The Chronological Donald, Vol. 4 (Disney)
- WALL•E: 3-Disc Special Edition (Disney)
- Peanuts Holiday Collection (Warner Bros.)
- Kung Fu Panda (Paramount)
- SpongeBob SquarePants: Season 5, Vol. 2 (Nickelodeon)
- Batman: The Complete Animated Series (Warner Bros.)
- Avatar: The Last Airbender: Complete Book 3 (Nickelodeon)
- The Yogi Bear Show: The Complete Series (Warner Bros.)
- Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends Seasons 1 and 2 (Cartoon Network)



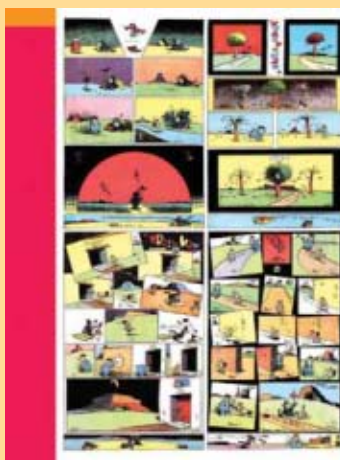
A Cat, a Mouse and a Bouncing Brick

One of my crazy neighbors once assured me that it's perfectly healthy to feel nostalgic for a by-gone era way before you were even born. Well,



that's how a lot of people feel about George Herriman's celebrated *Krazy Kat* comic strips. The dream world of Krazy Kat and Ignatz Mouse ruled U.S. newspapers between 1913 and 1944. Nobody can really understand the weirdo love triangle between Kat, Ignatz the mouse (who gets

a kick out of throwing bricks at Krazy's head) and the protective police dog, Officer Pupp. The team at Fantagraphics obviously knows how much art collectors and comic fans adore Herriman's creations, because they've put together the glorious 600-page (9" x 12") hardcover, ***Krazy & Ignatz: The Complete Sunday Strips 1935-1944***. Designed by none other than comic-book artist Chris Ware and edited by Bill Blackbeard, this fine collection is going to set you back \$95, but it's worth every penny. If you missed the first limited run of the 1925-1934 collection, Fantagraphics has a Second Edition in the works, so save that holiday cash from Grandma to snap up one of the 600 copies as soon as possible!



The New Sock Monkey Calendars Are Here!

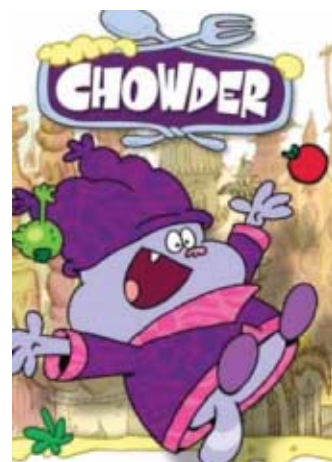
One of the easiest and most practical holiday gifts is the classic monthly wall calendar. All you have to do is match your gift recipient's taste (favorite animated or comic-book or live-action character) with the calendar theme, and bingo, you have something they will use every day of the year. For the purpose of this guide, we visited the local Border's book-store's



special calendar section, and discovered a huge increase in the variety of featured characters: Tinker Bell, SpongeBob SquarePants, Mickey Mouse Vintage Shorts, **WALL•E**, *Fraggle Rock*, *Marvel Heroes*, **Wallace & Gromit**, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Dr. Seuss and Pixar Favorites are only a few of the familiar ones. Even old-timers like Tweety Bird, **The Flintstones**, The Jetsons, Bambi, Sleeping Beauty and Tom & Jerry get their own monthly showcases. Of course, you really can't go wrong with either the 2009 Domo or **Sock Monkey** calendars! Visit www.calendars.com for more.

A Taste for Chowder

There are certain ways to spot a true fan of Cartoon Network's Emmy-winning **Chowder** series. Not only will they be able to tell you every plot synopsis for each of the 22 episodes produced, they'll know that the creator C.H. Greenblatt used to work on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and that he designed the main character of his show with the image of a child's soft squeeze toy in mind. Sadly, not a lot of merchandising has been on the market for the two-year-old show, but we found a great **t-shirt** for \$16.95 at www.cartoonnetworkshop.com and the first volume collection of the show on DVD (unfortunately only 10 episodes are included on the 110-minute disc) for \$9.99 on amazon.com. This will keep us all happy until the official Chowder cookbook comes along one day.

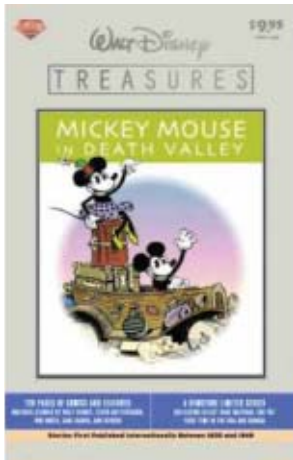


The Main Mouse at 80!

Exactly 80 years ago, on November 18, the screening of a little black-and-white cartoon called *Steamboat Willie* established Mickey Mouse as a true star of the silver screen. Written and directed by Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks, this wonderful seven-minute short went down in history as the first animated short film with a completely post-produced soundtrack of music (courtesy of Disney animator Wilfred Jackson) and sound effects. To honor the timeless mouse's big 80th birthday, we went searching for items that would be great mementos of the little guy's big debut and found an amazing 36"-tall **Limited Edition Collectible Steamboat Willie** figure on disneyshopping.com, but the price (\$499.95) may only appeal to junior moguls!

Fortunately, the website also offers a smaller hand-painted resin figurine by Jim Shore for \$40 and a wonderful lithograph which was created by Disney artists for the U.S. Postal Service's summer of 2008 Art of Disney stamp collection (\$39.50).

We also have our eye on the special **80th Anniversary Plane Crazy Snow Globe**, which highlights the first Mickey Mouse cartoon made by Walt Disney in 1928. On sale for \$69.99 this month, this beautiful globe has a rotating outside ring, which takes Mickey's plane on a wild flight, while Minnie and her pantaloon parachute moves up and down inside. We also recommend the classic **Walt Disney Treasures: Mickey Mouse in Black and White DVD**, 256 golden minutes of everyone's favorite rodent, and **Walt Disney Treasures - Mickey Mouse in Death Valley**, a companion 168-page comic-book paperback by Gemstone Publishing featuring epic adventures first published between 1930 and 1949. We just know Donald Duck is sitting somewhere and sulking big time about all these goodies!



10 Hot Toys and Collectibles



John K.'s Barack Obama Toy (RFX Toys)

Bakugan Starter Pack (Spinmaster)

Elmo Live (Fisher-Price)

EyeClops Night Vision Infrared Stealth Goggles (Jakks)

LEGO Star Wars Imperial Dropship (LEGO)

Cranium Hullabaloo (Hasbro)

Nightmare Before Christmas Head Knocker (NECA)

Tweety Computer Sitter Bobblehead (FUNKO)

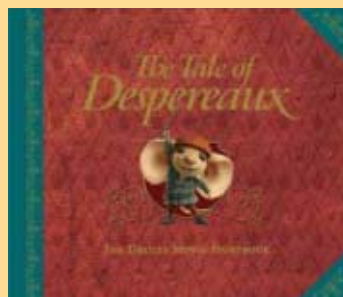
Star Wars: The Clone Wars Voice Changer (Hasbro)

Family Guy Night Time Lois & Peter Set (Mezco)

Source: amazon.com 11/7/08

Attack of the Holiday Movie Tie-Ins!

With DreamWorks' *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, Disney's *Bolt* and Universal's *Tale of Despereaux* duking it out at the box office this holiday season, it's not surprising to see so many tie-in toys in stores vying for our gift-buying dollars. Take your pick: You can fall for the numerous plush toys from the *Madagascar* clan's African journey



(how can you say no to those darn cute penguins or dancing lemurs?) or pick up various versions of this year's Hollywood pooch Bolt. If you like fighting for the underdog, maybe you'll consider the many different versions of Kate DiCamillo's gentle *Tale of Despereaux* (yes, there's even a graphic novel version) out in bookstores. So far, we haven't seen any tie-ins for *Waltz with Bashir*, but you never know!



Companies, Characters and Creativity Benchmarks

A few of our fave toon-related anniversaries of 2009

25 Years

All Roads Lead to Film Roman

It's a much sought-after right of passage for animation studios to reach the point where the team can sit back, relax and let an admirable body of work speak for them. Though they tell us that they "don't like to toot their own horn," the in-demand crew at Burbank, Calif.-based **Film Roman** has developed a comfortable, yet ever-expanding, legacy over the last 25 years. Founded in 1984 by award-winning animator/director Phil Roman, who cut his teeth working with Bill Melendez and Ralph Bakshi, Film Roman has built a reputation for A-class animation both for children and adult prime-time audiences. Though many in the industry during these first years considered TV animation a dead business, Roman and his crew proved them dead wrong.



The Simpsons

Now operating under the Starz Media umbrella and the leadership of CEO Kent Rice, Film Roman launched onto the scene by producing a number of *Garfield* television specials—every one of them an Emmy winner or nominee. Additional kids properties like *Bobby's World* and *Mother Goose & Grimm* soon joined the flock, and in 1994 the studio hit its stride when it assumed production of FOX's long-running prime-time hit, *The Simpsons*. The studio expanded into this older-audience territory with *The Critic*, the breakout first season of *Family Guy* and the full run of *King of the Hill*. Perhaps Film Roman's best-known work, *The Simpsons* shows the evolution of the studio's skill, style and technology throughout its unstoppable run.

As for the secret of Film Roman's success (besides, y'know, hard work or whatever), our contacts at the studio have one word: Carbohydrates. The studio shells out over \$16,000 dollars a year on Monday morning bagels, as well

as \$7,000 for donuts on Wednesdays to beat that midweek slump (Homer accounts for about \$4,500 worth of those donuts). Hopped up on chocolate glaze, the team of talented animators punch through deadlines with enough time to do some decorating: Take a stroll through the artists' cubes at Film Roman and you'll see walls covered in sketches, concepts and rude caricatures

of coworkers. Their artist-friendly attitude has clearly paid off; in addition to the nonstop production machine at work on *Simpsons*, the studio recently turned out the anime-inspired DVD project *Dead Space: Downfall* (based on EA's horror release *Dead Space*), is hard at work on under-the-radar preschool hit *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!* and will be handling animation for ABC's upcoming Mike Judge project *The Goode Family*.

Whether working with outside partners to bring quality animation to an array of projects or tackling home-grown productions, Film Roman brings some of the best artists, storytellers and experienced team leaders to the table. And bagels.

Website: www.filmroman.com



The Goode Family



King of the Hill

Toon Titans in a Half Shell

Whether you grew up thumbing through their comic books, kicked back with a pizza to watch their cartoon adventures in your college dorm or even raised a little ninja who demanded to be called "Donatello" at all times, chances are **Mirage Studios'** amphibious crime fighters the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** have touched (or karate chopped) your life in the last 25 years.

Co-founders and *TMNT* creators Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman established Mirage in 1983. The studio's name was coined by the two because they believed that working around Eastman's kitchen table was more of a "mirage" of a studio than an actual workspace. Current CEO Gary Richardson

shares another anecdote from the

early days of the studio: "When sending the first issue of the *TMNT* comic book, we used a local printer who had never printed a comic book before. Because of our inexperience, we didn't think to specify the size ... which is why the first issue is an over-sized book!"

Despite the awkward rookie years, *TMNT* took off, launching a comic and cartoon empire recognized the world over. In

addition to starring in several TV series (most recently *TMNT: Back to the Sewer*) and both live-action and animated features, the Turtles have spawned a Top 40 hit theme song, been interviewed by Barbara Walters and featured in a Smithsonian exhibit!

In honor of the Turtles' quarter-century landmark, Mirage is hard at work on a three-part animated television special starring the righteous dudes. Fans can also "Join the Shell-ebration" through a series of events in major cities (whimsically called "Galabungas"), a cross-country tour and a collaboration with a charitable cause to give back to the community. We're sure there will be a bodacious marathon or two to keep fans young and old totally turtled-out as well.

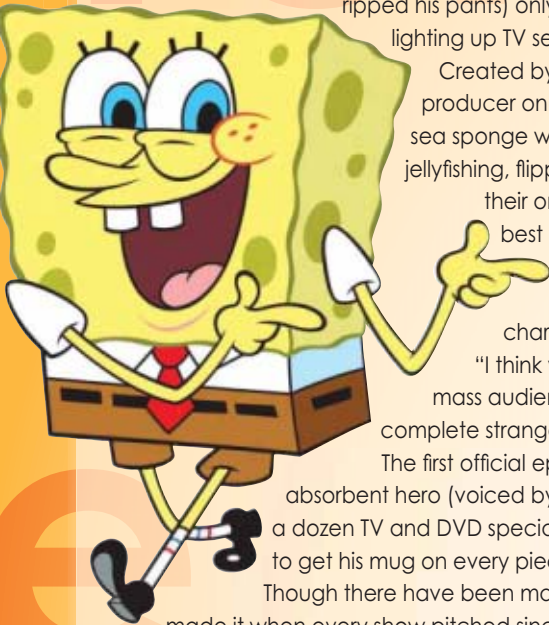
Website: www.ninjaturtles.com



10 Years

The Sponge King of Toon Town

Maybe it's all the flashing colors, rapid-fire humor, psychedelic animated dance numbers or all the hours spent chomping sugary cereal during his on-air marathons, but we could have sworn the world's most popular sea critter had burst onto the scene (and ripped his pants) only yesterday. Yes, readers, you are getting that old: **SpongeBob SquarePants** has been lighting up TV sets for 10 years now!



Created by animator, artist and former marine biologist Stephen Hillenburg (who used to be a producer on Nick's *Rocko's Modern Life*) this manically energetic show follows the exploits of a friendly sea sponge who makes his home in a pineapple in the undersea hamlet of Bikini Bottom. In between jellyfishing, flipping patties at Mr. Krab's fast food joint and trying to out-chop his pal Sandy the squirrel in their ongoing karate contest, SpongeBob finds plenty of time to get in to mischief (usually with his best friend, Patrick, a dimwitted starfish who lives under the rock nextdoor). While the out-there concept raised a few eyebrows in Toon Town, *SpongeBob* has gone on to become an international household name—talk about thinking outside the box (although the main character is kind of a square!).

"I think we all thought the show would be good, but I didn't ever assume it would catch on in a mass audience sort of way," Hillenburg told *Biography*. "Just seeing all the products out there and complete strangers wearing a drawing of a character that you created ... it's both wonderful and strange."

The first official episode of *SpongeBob* aired on Nickelodeon in July of 1999. Since then our energetic, absorbent hero (voiced by the hilarious Tom Kenny) has appeared in six seasons of the series, a theatrical feature, over a dozen TV and DVD specials and 11 shorts. And in the midst of this jam-packed toon schedule, *SpongeBob* managed to get his mug on every piece of L&M under the sun! (What kid could say no to a *SpongeBob* ear thermometer?)

Though there have been many attempts to mimick the trademark zaniness of this modern classic toon (you know you've made it when every show pitched since your launch dubs itself "the next *SpongeBob*"), the very best thing about the show is its inimitability—well, that and the sea shanties.

After a production hiatus in the early 2000s created a veritable panic amongst fans and sparked dozens of online petitions to keep *SpongeBob* alive (fears were misplaced, as the show resumed production shortly after the theatrical feature was released), the industry has realized just how invaluable a mold-breaking show like *SpongeBob SquarePants* is, both to fans and as an inspiration to aspiring artists and animators. (The show has put Nick on top of the Nielsen's cable ratings chart consistently.) We're sure Nick's president of animation Brown Johnson and the dedicated team in Burbank will keep a place for 'Bob and his pineapple for at least another 10 years.

Website: www.nick.com

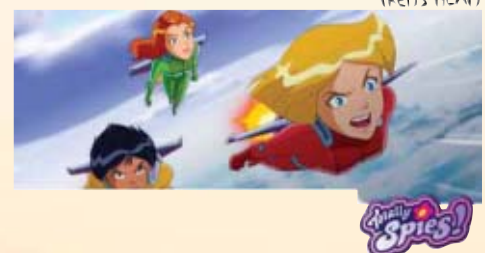
Rootin' Tootin' TouTen

Possessed of an indefatigable *joie de vivre*, a certain *je ne sais quois* and just a touch of *où est mon pamplemousse*, the folks at **TouTenKartoon** have always been able to deliver animation of an international caliber. Originally founded in Paris, France, by current president Jean-Louis Rizet in 1998, TouTenKartoon built a reputation for impeccable work and soon expanded with a second studio across the pond in Montreal, Canada, which this year celebrates its 10th anniversary. The toon house has since established a third studio in Angoulême, France. The international team of 3D and 2D digital artists is now helmed by Rizet, with CEO Laurent Donnay leading the Montreal-based crew.

The studio's showcase project is Marathon Production's *Totally Spies!*, an anime-influenced spy romp about a team of totally gorgeous teen super sleuths that travel the world foiling villains with their killer fight moves, high-tech gadgets and fabulous hair. The bright and bubbly comedy-adventure series has proved so popular that TouTenKartoon has been recruited to deliver *Totally Spies: The Movie*. The action packed flick will hit theaters in France next summer and will arrive on DVD in the U.S. as well. Despite the popularity of these toon gals, the studio tells us they are most proud of their work on another Marathon toon, extraterrestrial adventure series *Martin Mystery*.

With a crew that lists their silliest endeavor as a 3D scene done with 2D tools and their idol as Bugs Bunny, you know the team at TouTenKartoon lives and breathes animation. Whether they're churning out 3D aliens on *Monster Busters Club* or tweening the animated antics of *Fred's Head*, TouTenKartoon will continue to play a key role in the production of quality toons.

Website: www.toutenkartoon.ca



10 Years

10 Years of Toonz with an Exquisite Indian Flavor

Over the past decade India's economic growth, especially in the tech and entertainment fields, has turned the country into a major destination for international producers seeking efficient, quality animation production. More recently we have seen the rise of home-brewed animation projects in the region. Throughout this remarkable period of growth and transformation, **Toonz Animation India** has been leading the drive towards perfecting skills and promoting Indian culture and storytelling through animation.

Founded in 1999 by the late business and technology guru G. A. Menon, Toonz Animation India is currently helmed by globetrotter CEO P. Jayakumar. The studio is located in Trivandrum, known for its IT and biotech industry as well as for hosting India's only animation park. Toonz has quickly emerged as a jack-of-all-trades house, offering traditional and digital 2D, 3D and stop-motion animation on top of pre-production and vfx services. The studio has built its reputation by working with industry top dogs like Marvel, Cartoon Network and Disney, among others. Its colorful original series, *The Adventures of Tanali Raman*, kicked off on Cartoon Network India in 2003 and has become its most popular project. The series, based on Indian folklore, follows the exploits of a king's favored courtier with many enemies who must use his wit and charm to overcome the obstacles they throw at him.

Western audiences will be able to check out one of Toonz's latest 2D projects when the action-packed comic-book adventure series *Wolverine and the X-Men* launches in February. Also in the works is a co-production with L.A.-based Hyde Park Ent. and Gang of 7 Animation on a feature-length CG adaptation of *Wizard of Oz* author L. Frank Baum's *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*. Deeply inspired by Pixar honcho John Lasseter and touched by an untiring drive to succeed, Toonz Animation is an international player we'll continue to hear from in the years to come. So, if you see Mr. Jayakumar's limo stuck in Trivandrum traffic, be sure to wave hello!

Website: www.toonzanimationindia.com



An Inspirational Legacy: The Chuck Jones Center for Creativity

It seems not a month goes by without the name of legendary *Looney Tunes* animator Chuck Jones gracing our pages. If it's not another beautiful collection of his work on DVD or in a glossy-paged book, it's industry vets and up-and-comers alike citing him as the man whose work sparked their love for animation. Whiletoon fans have sorely missed Jones since his passing in 2002, for the last 10 years **The Chuck Jones Center for Creativity** has been nurturing his legacy and using his art to inspire future generations of creators.

Lead by a board comprised mostly of Jones' family members, the Chuck Jones Center seeks to inspire new ways of thinking through creativity, both on a local scale and all over the world, with a focus on helping children find a love of art and appreciation of their own creative abilities. The Center utilizes its massive archive of Jones' work and its financial resources to inspire with gallery exhibitions, educational outreach and artist recognition for students and indie filmmakers, such as its 2008 partnership with the Newport Beach Film Festival (Jones spent his childhood and later life in the city).

Despite its inspiring focus, the Center maintains a touch of Jones' silly humor, as chairman of the board of directors (and grandson of the celebrated artist) Craig Kausen shares: "We donated a large mural to a children's hospital based on the cartoon *What's Opera, Doc?* that included Bugs Bunny, Elmer Fudd, spears, horned helmets and references to 'Kill da wabbit' ... It was quickly dubbed the 'Death Mural,' so we replaced it with a happy rendition of Bugs and Daffy dancing on stage."

Future endeavors at the Center include a series of web-based educational programs using highlights of the documentary *Chuck Jones: Memories of Childhood* (2008), which mixes new and archival material to explore the roots of adult creativity in childhood experiences. Whatever else the future holds, the CJCC will continue to serve the animation community through inspiration.

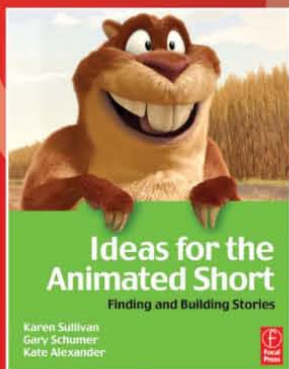
Website: www.chuckjonescenter.org

CHUCK JONES
Center for
Creativity



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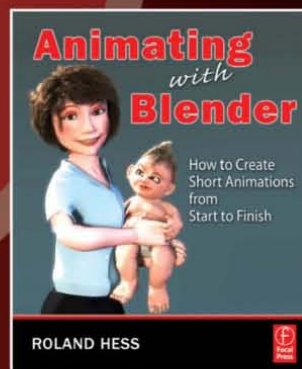
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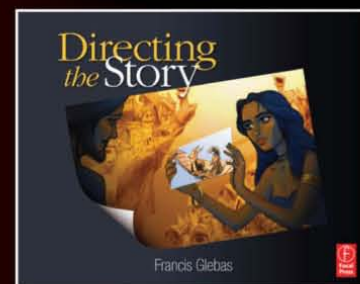
Ideas for the Animated Short
By Karen Sullivan, Gary Schumer
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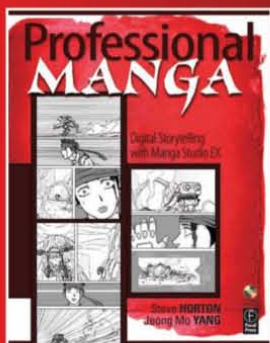
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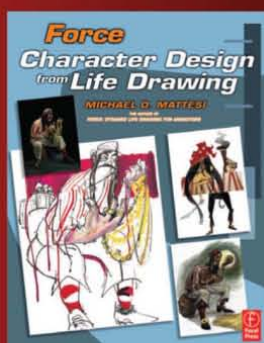
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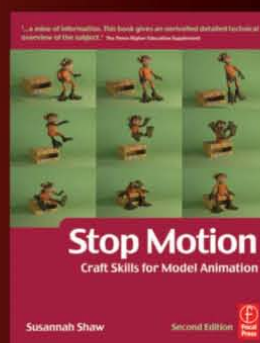
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S4: The Best Solution for Identity Crisis

With all the great advances in animation and vfx software, animated magic has seeped into all corners of the entertainment industry, often squeaking past the radar of your average viewer. But every once in a while there's a commercial or show promo that manages to raise an eyebrow in its few seconds on screen, and make you wonder just how *they* did *that*. One of the great "theys" of broadcast design (not to mention animation and effects), **S4 Studios, LLC** celebrates its 10-year anniversary this year.

Founded in the fall of 1999 by Geoffrey Kater and Dale Hendricks, S4 Studios sits in the very heart of Hollywood, in prime position to offer their skills to the key entertainment players they call their neighbors. The studio is now run by CEO Kater and current co-owner Larry Le Francis, who function as creative heads for S4's projects.



Fraidy Cat

Some of their best known and most recognizable work is broadcast identity branding for NBC Universal's Universal HD and niche networks like mysteries hub Sleuth and horror destination Chiller. Created by Kater, Le Francis and creative director Thomas Helmintoller, the Chiller package (which launched in 2007) consisted of various length teasers, graphics packages and a 90-second promo. These materials caught the attention of the CG community and garnered props for the studio as a skilled design house.

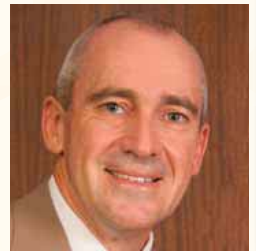
The spooky crew at S4 has also recently launched Theatre S4 for the web; an original content destination which will feature creepy animated shorts along a horror theme. The first of these, Flash-animated *Fraidy Cat*, has picked up a lot of online buzz for its unsettling depiction of an elderly apartment dweller pushed too far. As for what keeps the folks at S4 Studios going, "We love creating great animation and cool visual effects," Kater says, "Also, it beats selling insurance policies."

Website: www.s4studios.com



Ten Years at the Top

Over the past several years, the trend toward outsourcing as well as the thriving animation markets in Japan and Korea have lead to the growth of a sparkling new animation industry across Asia. One of the leaders in this emerging market is Philippines-based **Top Draw Animation**. TV animation veteran Wayne Dearing founded the studio in November of 1999, and over the last 10 years has built a remarkable team of local artists and production heads who deliver high quality 2D animation for many popular kids' shows around the world. Dearing runs the company as managing director, while his wife Stella serves as general manager.



Wayne Dearing

Working in state-of-the-art facilities in the heart of Manila, Top Draw's 600-plus artists crank out beautiful animation for international players like France's Xilam and Samka Productions, Cartoon Saloon in Ireland and Canada's Studio B Productions, with which Top Draw maintains a strong, multi-production relationship. With each of these cooperative experiences, the growing studio gains shared knowledge and insight to incorporate into the developing culture of the company. In turn, visiting studios get a glimpse at the scope of the Asian animation industry: "People are always surprised when they visit us by the size, quality and substantial nature of our facilities, as well as by the size of our large team," Dearing tells us, noting the studio's in-house slogan, "Big enough to matter, small enough to care."

The real turning point in Top Draw's evolution came when the studio adopted Flash technology into its pipeline in 2003. The cost effectiveness and ease of use in working with Flash supported Top Draw's continual growth and allowed them to take on more and more projects. Today, Flash-based digital 2D

comprises about 80 percent of work produced at the studio. It's a good job they've found a way to keep up, because by the end of 2009, Top Draw will have completed more than 500 half-hours of animated series! The studio's production roster includes *Being Ian*, *Ricky Sprocket: Showbiz Boy*, *George of the Jungle*, *Class of the Titans*, *Eliot Kid* and *Skunk Fu!*, to name a few. *Being Ian* (for Studio B) has won numerous awards in Canada, and has been



Being Ian

awarded funding via the prestigious Shaw Rocket Prize for outstanding Canadian children's programming. Additionally, two of Top Draw's most popular titles have nabbed U.K. BAFTA Award nominations this year: *Skunk Fu!* and *Eliot Kid*.

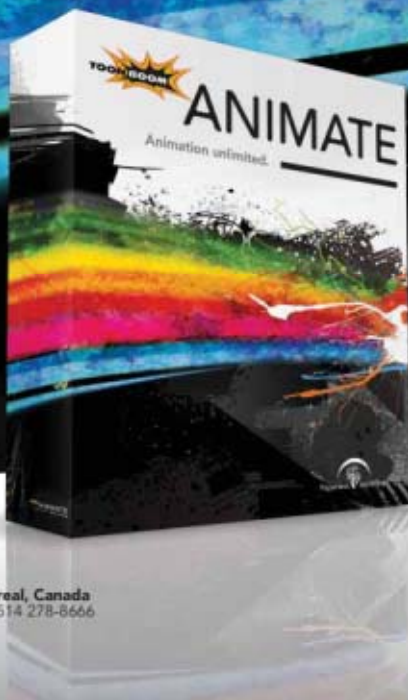
Regardless of the international recognition, Dearing and his team are just happy to be part of the business. "Animation is a lifestyle business, and it's become an integral part of our own life style," he says, "Let's face it, we don't have to grow up. We get to travel the finer places around the world and get to play with other people all over the world who also didn't have to grow up!"

The Top Draw crew is currently kicking off the start of its second decade in the biz by going into production on the second season of Studio B's *Martha Speaks* (airing on PBS KIDS) and Samka's *Invisible I.N.K.* series about a team of kid freedom fighters (the Intelligence Network of Kids) who use their super spy abilities to try to prevent their cool school from falling victim to the tyranny of its wicked deputy. With an ever-growing, ever-improving team and a global reputation, we can't wait to see the wonders Wayne and company will pull out of their sleeves next.

Website: www.topdrawanimation.com



Animation unlimited.



Montreal, Canada
T: +1 514 278-8666

"As the title suggests, Toon Boom Animate is built with one type of user in mind - the animator. The way it works simply makes sense, and it took me about as much time to learn as it did to open the box. Like many digital artists, I use a variety of software packages in my productions, and Animate has already become a mainstay in my toolbox."

Aaron Simpson, Founder of ColdHardFlash.com and Lineboil.com



toonboom.com

Paris, France
T: +33 (0)1 40 18 77 90

10 Years

SPECIAL REPORT
WWW.ANIMATIONMAGAZINE.NET

Atomic Cartoons: A Decade of Bringing Their A-Game



Over the past decade, Vancouver-based **Atomic Cartoons** has utilized its artists' exuberance, talent and technical skill in both traditional cel and Flash-based animation to churn out some of the most successful new 2D series of the past decade.

Atomic was founded in 1999 by Olaf Miller, Trevor Bentley, Mauro Casalese and Rob Davies, who were united by their shared "addiction" to animation and admiration for toon greats like Chuck Jones and Maurice Noble. Now one of Canada's most prolific studios, Atomic Cartoons built its reputation by doing pre-production and animation for industry

Captain Flamingo



heavy-weights such as Cartoon Network, Warner Bros., Film Roman, Nelvana, and Disney. Atomic provided their talent on everything from comedy, to pre-school, to all-out action adventure. In their early years they became widely known as Flash animation pioneers, churning out online shorts such as Chuck Jones' *Timberwolf* during the Internet boom of the early 2000s. Alluding to the many adult themed shorts that they covertly produced during this time, studio partner Olaf Miller jokes they created, "A lot of Internet cartoons during the dotcom era I can't discuss." Today,



Atomic's founders (from left) Mauro Casalese, Olaf Miller, Rob Davies and Trevor Bentley

Atomic continues to offer a wide range of service work—everything from character design to post-production—but its their sparky crop of home-brewed characters that have really put this go-getter studio on the map.

Atomic's breakout proprietary series *Atomic Betty* (co-produced by Breakthrough Films) launched onto the TV scene in 2004, debuting on Canada's TELETOON and Cartoon Network in the U.S. Since then, the spunky space girl has blasted off to over 100 countries, buckled three seasons and an hour-long Christmas special under her utility belt and won over fans across the galaxy. The show follows Betty, the brainy little girl-next-door from Moose Jaw Heights who is harboring a secret: When the universe is in trouble, she becomes a karate-chopping space age superhero! Together with her brilliant robot X-5 and hyperactive co-pilot Sparky, she defends far off planets from the villainous Supreme Overlord and other baddies. With its colorful action sequences, energetic humor and '60s futurist style designs (reminiscent of Hanna-Barbera's space toon *The Jetsons*), *Betty* has earned nominations for a whole bushel of awards, from the Annie to the BAFTA.

Their second proprietary property, *Captain Flamingo* (also produced with Breakthrough, as well as Heroic Film Co. and PASI Animation), has been winning over audiences across the English-speaking world since 2006. Atomic recently announced that the caped (and beaked) mini-hero has wrapped his third season, and viewers

simply can't get enough. Captain Flamingo is actually a young boy named Milo, who deals with the usual dramas of youth (younger siblings, long lines at the ice-cream truck) ... but when a little kid is in trouble, all they have to do is yell out "Uh oh, Flamingo!" and Milo transforms into a pink-clad problem solver. Although he usually bumbles his rescue attempts, with the help of his friend Lizbeth—who harbors a not so secret crush on the dashing hero—Captain Flamingo always pulls through and saves the day.

In addition to these well-loved pint-sized superheroes, the untiring team at Atomic continues to live up to its motto of "Create, Produce, Deliver, Repeat" and has plenty of proprietary productions and co-productions in the pipes: *Mythunderstood*, *Task Force Shaman*, *Bros. Unicorn*, *Randomations*, *Big City Birds*, *Sokator 442*, *Punktuition*, *Disc Bots*, *Secret Agent Band* ... just enough to keep 'em busy.

Though their creative juices can churn out everything from laser-blast filled space adventures to fantasy quest epics, these projects are all united by an attention to detail and obvious love of the medium. As for their rapid rise to the top, Miller attributes their success to a positive attitude ... or to being completely oblivious to pain. Whatever the cause, we're definitely psyched for their upcoming "zombies-meets-space aliens-meets-Anne of Green Gables" project—even if they are pulling our legs, we're sure they're the only toon house crazy enough to make it work!

Website: www.atomiccartoons.com

Atomic Betty



5 Years

Five Years of the Lux(e) Life

Nestled on the outskirts of Northern California's Silicon Valley in San Mateo, Luxology LLC has been answering the animation community's software needs with significant insight and ingenuity since its launch in 2002. The company is helmed by its trio of tight-knit founders: Chief scientist Allen Hastings, CTO Stuart Ferguson and president/CEO Brad Peebler. The company evolved out of their shared experiences working at NewTek on the LightWave 3D project (created by Hastings), for which Hastings and Ferguson won an Emmy in '93. With Hastings' pioneering 3D software programming work, Ferguson's devotion to interface design and Peebler's dedication to helping digital artists through support, tutorials and training outreach, the team was able to create and continue to improve upon one of the most important programs in the industry today: **modo**.

Luxology

Watch created in modo by Ryan Drue



Launched at SIGGRAPH in 2004, modo quickly became a well-used tool amongst animation and effects firms riding the wave caused by the surge in 3D animation's popularity. Industry trend-setters like studios Digital Domain, The Embassy and Pixar soon incorporated modo into their pipelines, sending Luxology on a journey of improvement and innovation over the next five years. The second generation, modo 201, added 3D painting and won an Apple Design Award in 2006. The latest edition, 302, incorporates years of improvements such as UV editing; sculpting; camera, light and morph animation; and a brand new physical sky and sun model, among many others. Plugging away under the slogan "modo is for artists," the crew in San Mateo continue to develop the kind of crucial new tools and integrated features that keep this modeler at the top of the line.

Modo has proved to be a versatile tool, and has been used to create characters and concepts across a broad spectrum of films, commercials, videogames, architecture and interior design, to name a few. Recently, modo has featured in the theatrical romp *The Ant Bully* and was used exclusively to model the character EVE in

Disney/Pixar's *WALL•E*. With team leaders with a "strong aversion to meetings," who honor artists with a constantly updated gallery of user images, keep a robotic bartender on hand and list classic game programmer John Carmack (*Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, *Quake*) as their role model, we can't wait to see what amazing CG feats modo will have accomplished in another five years!

Website: www.luxology.com

One Tough Cookie: Cookie Jar Celebrates Five Years of Fresh-Baked Toons

When you combine a love for children's entertainment with a desire to help nurture and educate them through endearing stories, colorful characters and home-grown learning, you get something very special; no, not that industry dirty word "edutainment"! We're talking about kids' programming powerhouse **The Cookie Jar Group**. Comprised of Cookie Jar Entertainment and Cookie Jar Education, CJG seeks to use their slate of well loved characters to amuse and educate children both at home and in the classroom, and if their snowballing success over the last five years is anything to go by, we'd say they're succeeding. What else would you expect from a company that holds up Søren Kierkegaard to the candle many in our industry reserve for Walt Disney?

Cookie Jar rose out of the ashes of former Toon Town goliath CINAR when Nelvana helmers Michael Hirsh and Toper Taylor purchased the operation in 2004. After rebranding the enterprise under the new name—which they tell us was actually suggested by author and illustrator Huck Scarry, who was a consultant on the company's *Hurray For Huckle!* series—Hirsh and Taylor set out to build upon the existing catalogue of children's shows, and in the process developed an international programming empire with offices in Toronto, Quebec, Paris, Los Angeles and Tokyo, among other places. Hirsh and Taylor currently serve as CEO and COO, respectively.

CJG has most recently succeeded in acquiring several classic American Greetings Properties projects through their newly included subsidiary, DiC. Some of the newest franchises to join the Cookie Jar roster are *Care Bears*, *Strawberry Shortcake* and *Inspector Gadget*. These join perennial childhood favorites like *Arthur*, *Caillou* and *Gerald McBoing Boing* as well as more modern action-adventure series like *Johnny Test*, *Spider-Riders*, *World of Quest* and *Magi-Nation*. In addition to a plethora of established shows and characters, Cookie Jar is also constantly seeking new and fresh ways to entertain and inspire children. Two upcoming projects that have the CJG crew excited are *Mudpit*, an animated/live-action combo series aimed at tweens, and *Ugly Americans*, which is targeted for primetime.

With so many well loved properties to keep track of, it's amazing how Cookie Jar manages to stay on top of it all. Much of this is due to the tireless vision shared by Hirsh and Taylor for the company: "We want to have fun, learn and grow as individuals and as a company," they tell us when asked why they stay in our turbulent business. They strive to create an environment for their projects which encourages both immersion and energetic debate to ensure that the final product will stand the test of time and that very fickle audience: kids!

Website: www.cookiejarcompany.com



Inspector Gadget

Johnny Test



What About Felix?

We haven't forgotten the big anniversaries of Felix and all your other favorite characters! We're just saving those for the next issue! ■



DEC•08/JAN•09

41

From Dragon Ball Z to Eternity:

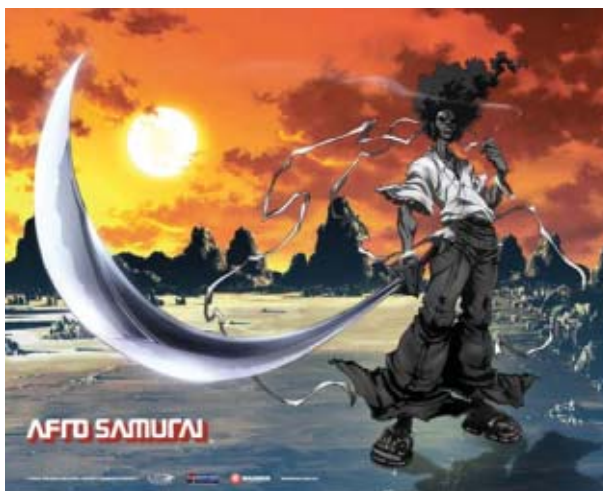
At 15, FUNimation takes the anime revolution to new platforms.

American fans of Akira Toriyama's hugely popular manga *Dragon Ball Z* are forever indebted to Texas-based FUNimation, which licensed the property over a decade ago. Under the leadership of Gen Fukunaga, the brand-management company has continued to import in-demand anime gems from Japan during the past 15 years, and is branching out in different directions to keep up with this fast-evolving sector of the entertain world.

"Back when we started, you couldn't find any mass-market type of anime properties in the U.S.," recalls Fukunaga. "Other than older classics like *Speed Racer*, most of the anime was sold in very niche VHS markets. Then with the arrival of *Pokémon* and *Dragon Ball*, anime really started to take off around 1998."

A high-tech entrepreneur, Fukunaga, who had lived in Japan back when he was in eighth grade, took advantage of this great void in the market. "In those days, all you got on U.S. TV was Road Runner or Disney stuff, while when I went to Japan, I was able to enjoy all this multi-layered dramatic animation about giant robots and shape-shifting creatures which wasn't all sugar-coated."

FUNimation was acquired by Navarre in 2005, but it continues to track down the anime titles that have potential for drawing fans outside Japan. It recently acquired several titles licensed through Geneon's U.S.A. division and ADV Films. Last year, the company bought the rights to *Vexille*, Shochiku's sci-fi toon helmed by Fumihiko Sori (*Appleseed*).



ERVair CHRoNiCLE, Yu Yu Hakusho, Fullmetal Alchemist and Suzuka. With all these hot titles in its arsenal, it's not surprising that FUNimation is estimated to be leading the \$300 million anime DVD



Gen Fukunaga

industry in the U.S.

Fukunaga says he's also looking forward to February when the company will release the eagerly awaited *Afro Samurai: Resurrection* (featuring the voices of Samuel L. Jackson, Lucy Liu and Mark Hamill), the sequel to the 2007 hit Spike TV series.

To fight the prevalent problem of Internet piracy, FUNimation has been working on various strategies to monetize the online popularity of anime titles. It recently launched its programming partnership with online video services Hulu, YouTube and Joost. "We're working on all those fronts as well as maintaining the DVDs, which is our core audience," says Fukunaga. "Anime audiences are very tech-savvy, but a big problem for the industry is that they're now used to watching the shows online illegally. However, we are moving heavily into the Internet front—including social networking sites, as well as VOD formats. We're also picking up more live-action Japanese movies in the future."

Regardless of how many new successful projects the company embraces in the future, there will always be one title that will have a special place in Fukunaga's heart. "When you look at our catalog, you realize that a property like *Dragon Ball* only happens once in a lifetime. It touches people all over the world in so many different ways!" ■

Other recent FUNimation acquisitions include *Samurai 7*, *Claymore*, *Darker Than Black*, *D.Gray-Man*, *Tsubasa: RES-*

To learn more, visit www.funimation.com.

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A Double Milestone for Antonucci and the Eds!

This coming year is going to be a big year for bad boy animator Danny Antonucci: His Vancouver-based studio a.k.a Cartoon turns 15, while his popular Cartoon Network series *Ed, Edd n Eddy* celebrates its 10th year on the air in January. We just had to catch up with the always-entertaining and outspoken animator to wish him well and see what kind of outrageous plans he has for this special year:

Animag: Congrats on the two big anniversaries! Tell us what you've been up to!

Danny Antonucci: Well, it's amazing to mark 15 years of annoying people in the animation world. And my lips have yet to see an ass! Right now we're wrapping up our *Ed, Edd n Eddy* movie, which will be broadcast on Cartoon Network in 2009. We're also working with Bob Higgins and the team at WILDBRAIN and we have some really cool plans of inundating the world with some cool animated projects that will move us away from the kids' world and into the adult arena.

Animag: So what's going to happen to the boys in this movie?

Antonucci: It's a 90-minute adventure, and what happens is that the Eds do something really bad, and they find themselves running away from Cul-De-Sac to find a safe place. We finally get to see Eddy's mysterious older brother. They're introduced to a new character. Some questions will get answered. There'll be all sort of goodies. And the whole thing will be very dynamic and done in a wide-screen format. We've worked on the movie for the past two years, with the same crew that worked on the show.

Animag: In your opinion, how has the animation scene evolved in the past 15 years or so?

Antonucci: Geez, 15 years. Well, we've got a few artists and a lot more techni-

cians in this field. I will continue in my crusade to make it known that artists make cartoons, not software. On a larger scale, animation has got a lot more exposure, a lot of big movies have been released. But when it comes to maintaining animation as an art form, that has become smaller, and that freaks me out! I want to see more human-generated projects!

Animag: Why do you think *Ed, Edd n Eddy* became such a solid hit?

Antonucci: We really played up the traditional aspect of cartoons and the characters, which is what people fall in love with and can relate to in the first place. When I was a kid, it was about Popeye, Bugs Bunny, and all the other Warner Bros. characters—you really cared about them and thought that they actually existed. When we set out to launch the show, I wanted to create an animated world with soul—it was less about creating a beautifully designed, pretty show than it was about characters and stories kids could hang on to. When I think about the fact that 30 million households all over the world watch that show, dude, that's insane! It isn't about that shiny CGI crap. I made the Eds ugly on purpose. Just to say "F you" to what was going on. Everything we do is done by people—and we literally put mistakes in, because we want it to look like humans, and

not machines, make the cartoons.

Animag: What kind of advice does wise man Danny give the kids out there who want to follow in your footsteps?

Antonucci: Draw, draw and draw! I always say you have to follow your heart and don't just repeat what's out there. Ask yourself, "Hey, how can I change things?" Remember the three Cs: Contribute, Challenge and Change! Don't friggin' use the same formulas. It's like Pixar makes a movie which ends up making 10 zillion dollars, and then, every studio puts out the same movie trying to cash in. I mean, why bother?!

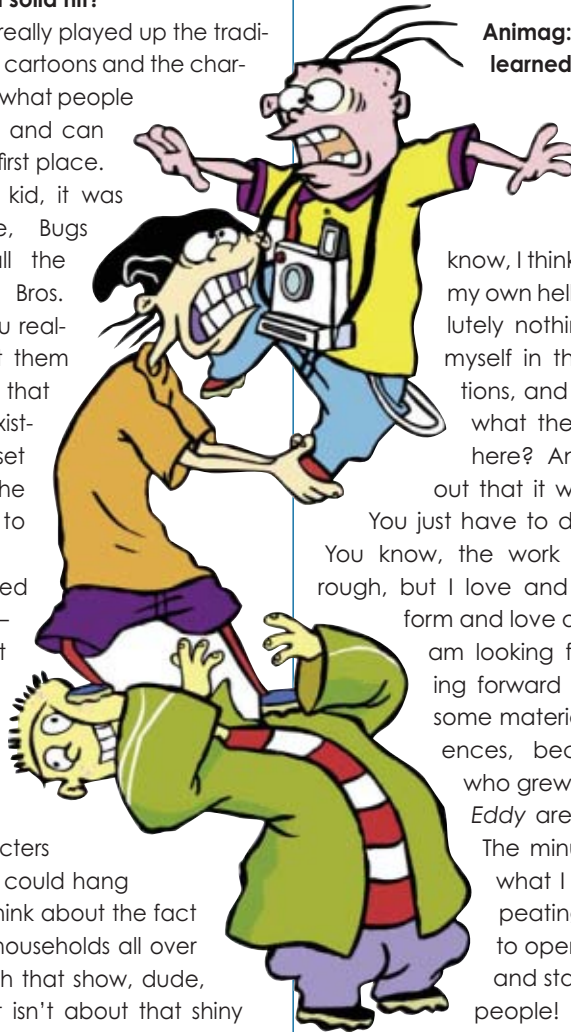


Danny Antonucci

Animag: So, have you learned any lessons from all your colorful experiences in the animation business?

Antonucci: You know, I think I tend to create my own hell and learn absolutely nothing from it. I put myself in these crazy situations, and then ask myself, what the f--- am I doing here? And then, it turns out that it was the best trip.

You just have to dive in head first. You know, the work is draining and rough, but I love and respect this art form and love doing what I do. I am looking forward to moving forward and working on some material for older audiences, because the folks who grew up on *Ed, Edd n Eddy* are now older, too! The minute I stop loving what I do and start repeating myself, it's time to open up a pizza joint and start selling pizza to people! ■



To catch up with Danny's boys and watch episodes online, visit www.cartoonnetwork.com/tv_shows/eds.

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 ARS ELECTRONICA

Bardel: Two Decades of Indie Innovations

The Vancouver studio continues to expand in new directions.

One of the biggest advantages of working in animation is the dedication and passion of most of the people who work in this crazy business. Perhaps that's why Barry Ward and Delna Bhesania, the husband-and-wife founders of Vancouver-

based indie toon house Bardel Entertainment, are such perfect examples of the amazing caliber of professionals we have come to know in this world.

Barry and Delna established the studio back in 1988 with their life savings of \$2,000 in a spare bedroom in their apartment. It's a testament to their hard work and talent that the small venture has ballooned into a 300-plus person operation, which is considered one of the major studios in Canada, in only two decades.

"The initial plan was to provide ink-and-paint services for the local animation studios as an alternative to sending animation to Asia," recalls Barry. "The timing was good as both *The Simpsons* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* had been major successes, and the industry was coming out of a slump. The major studios, such as Disney and Warner Bros., were also starting to produce television series, such as *DuckTales* and *Tiny Toons* (which Bardel worked on, until the series were sent overseas). As a result, the animation services business grew, and so did Bardel."

One of Bardel's first consistent clients was Spike and Mike's Animation Festival. These contracts consisted of finishing the unfinished student films from CalArts, and completing them on film for the festival. "Several



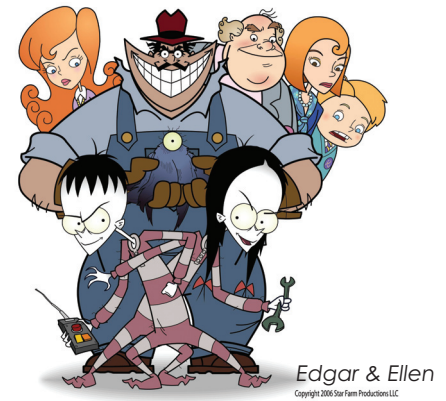
The Early Years: Husband-and-wife team Barry Ward and Delna Bhesania formed Vancouver-based Bardel Entertainment in 1988 to offer service work to clients such as Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation, Marv Newland and DreamWorks Animation.



of those films were created by people who are the major players in the animation industry today—including Andrew Stanton and Pete Docter of Pixar, Dave Wason of Disney and Craig McCracken of Cartoon Network," notes Barry

Joseph: *King of Dreams*, DreamWorks Animation's direct-to-video sequel to *The Prince of Egypt*, opened new doors for Bardel in 1999. For this project, Bardel set up a 20,000 square foot production facility and hired animators and artists from all over the globe, and the results were quite spectacular.

To keep up with the competition from animation studios overseas in Asia, Bardel was one of the first studios to venture ahead in Flash and web-based technologies. "By using our studio's highly skilled animators, proficient in limited animation techniques, we were able to repurpose this web-based technology for broad-



Edgar & Ellen
Copyright 2006 Star Farm Productions LLC

cast," says Barry. "After all, Flash is kind of like Hanna-Barbera on steroids."

A series of award-winning shorts led to the great gig of producing Warner Bros.' first Flash-animated series, *Mucha Lucha!* The studio then went on to produce Flash series for several companies, including Disney, Turner Studios and Starz Entertainment. The animators at Bardel continue to experiment and stretch the limits of 2D digital software, recently co-venturing with 4Kids Entertainment on the Flash action-adventure series *Chaotic* and teaming up with Chicago's Star Farm Productions to produce the award-winning series *Edgar & Ellen*.

Barry points out that the studio was a bit of a late bloomer in 3D animation, and didn't become fully involved in it until 2003 when they animated a Buzz Lightyear CD-ROM for Disney. Since that time, however, Bardel has certainly caught up with the competitors, producing two of its own DTV movies, providing work on two 3D feature films and, most recently, completing production on the 52-episode series, *Viva Piñata*, a successful co-venture with 4Kids Entertainment based on the popular Microsoft game.

Developing its own proprietary properties was another way for Bardel to be less reliant on service work, which traditionally had seldom been consistent. In 1998, Bardel started to build relationships with Canadian broad-



Viva Piñata

20 Years of Bardel Projects

- 1988** Spike & Mike's Animation Festival
Marv Newland's International Rocketship
- 1989** Shamu, the Beginning (Sea World)
- 1990** Tiny Toon Adventures (Warner Bros.)
Rover Dangerfield (Hyperion)
- 1992** Bebe's Kids (Hyperion)
Fievel Goes West (Nelvana)
- 1993** The Pink Panther (MGM)
Once Upon a Forest (Hanna-Barbera)
- 1994** Tales from the Cryptkeeper (Nelvana)
The Magic School Bus (Nelvana)
- 1995** Stickin' Around (Nelvana)
- 1996** Space Jam (Warner Bros.)
- 1997** Anastasia (Fox)
- 1998** The Prince of Egypt (DreamWorks)
- 1999** Joseph: King of Dreams (DreamWorks)
- 2000** The Road to El Dorado (DreamWorks)
Adam Sandler's Eight Crazy Nights (Sony)
- 2001** Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron (DreamWorks)
- 2002** The Christmas Orange (Bardel)
Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas (DreamWorks)
- 2003** Silverwing (Bardel)
Buzz Lightyear and Winnie the Pooh games (Disney)
Mucha Lucha! (Warner Bros.)
- 2004** Dragons: Fire & Ice (MEGA Bloks)
The Buzz About Maggie (Disney TV)
- 2005** Happily N'Ever After (Vanguard, BFC Berliner)
- 2006** Viva Piñata (4Kids)
Chaotic (4Kids)
- 2007** Edgar and Ellen (Star Farm, Nickelodeon)
Wow! Wow! Wubbzy! (Frederator, Starz Media)
- 2008** Zeke's Pad (Bardel, Avрил Stark, Leaping Lizard)
Kid Riot Digital (Bardel's new interactive arm)



The Christmas Orange
Copyright 2002 The Christmas Orange Productions Inc.



casters and eventually launched a distribution arm (Bardel Distribution) working with Brenda Wooding as its sales agent.

In 2002, TELETOON aired Bardel's first show, a half-hour special titled *The Christmas Orange*, which went on to win many awards internationally. "*The Christmas Orange* was a new challenge for Bardel", says CEO and co-founder, Delna Bhesania. "It was Bardel's first time where we were involved in scripts, music, voices and final post-production, but the efforts were worth it. We were able to create a great project both audiences and critics loved, as evidenced by its Leo Awards win for best animated program."

In 2003, Bardel started production on its first animated TV series, *Silverwing*, based on the best selling novels by Kenneth Oppel, which was followed by two direct-to-DVD CG-animated movies, *Dragons: Metal Ages* and *Dragons: Fire and Ice*, with their partner MEGA Bloks. Bardel is currently completing production on its proprietary CG TV series, *Zeke's Pad*, which is a co-production with L.A.-based Leaping Lizard Productions and Avрил Stark Entertainment in Australia.

The latest development in

Bardel's 20-year journey is the founding of its interactive division, Kid Riot Digital. Kid Riot works closely with Bardel's TV development division, and focuses on the creation of immersive kids' virtual worlds that are supported by TV, mobile and merchandizing. Created in partnership with American Greetings and CBC, *Toki World* is Kid Riot's first virtual world (currently in prototype).

The entertainment world has changed a lot in the past two decades, but it's comforting to know that talented people like Barry and Delna continue to thrive despite the many challenges that face indie toon studios all over. One thing's for certain: We'll be writing about their awesome projects as long as they keep making them!

For more info, visit www.bardel.ca.



A Few Questions for Barry

Bardel president Barry Ward answers a few burning question on the occasion of his company's big 20th birthday:

What is the Bardel's most famous product/character/project?

Barry Ward: It's always a thrill for me when I walk around our studio and see characters that I've grown up with all my life—Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, Fred Flintstone, Winnie the Pooh or more recent ones like Buzz Lightyear. (The Warner characters were from Space Jam, Hanna-Barbera's are from commercials and the Disney characters were from CD-ROM projects we worked on.) The studio's most prestigious production was definitely DreamWorks' *Joseph: King of Dreams*. For this project we built a 20,000 sq. ft. production facility and staffed it with more than 150 artists and managers from all over the world. DreamWorks was fantastic to work with and supported us every step of the way, making sure that the resulting direct-to-video movie was a suitable companion to their wonderful feature film *The Prince of Egypt*.



What is one thing nobody can guess about you?

It's crazy, but even after 20 years, there are still lots of people who don't know that our studio name comes from Barry and [my wife and co-owner's name] Delna.

What is the best thing you ever did?

Probably the best thing that we ever did was to start to develop and produce our own content. Starting with the holiday special *The Christmas Orange* in 2002, up to our current CG series, *Zeke's Pad*, airing in the Spring of 2009. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing your own work appreciated by an

audience. As well as these two projects we have produced two DTV movies—*Dragons: Metal Ages* and *Dragons: Fire and Ice*—and the series *Silverwing*.

What are some of your cool, upcoming projects?

The most exciting project right now is being produced through Bardel's new interactive division, Kid Riot. It's a kids' Virtual World called *Toki World*. This immersive online environment for kids six to 12 is tied into a major U.S. retailer, and will be up and running in the fall of next year.

Why do you stay in business?

We stay in business because we love jet lag, long working days, never seeing our children, always having to hire and then lay off artists, and most of all we totally love dealing with the constant upturns and downswings of our industry, and the insecurity that running an animation studio brings.



What is your in-house slogan?

The assets of our company are the asses sitting in our seats.

Who is your biggest role model?

My choice and Delna's would probably be quite different. I don't really have a role model, but one guy I respect a lot is Danny Antonucci. He created a show that's lasted for more than eight years on one of the biggest broadcasters in the world, yet he's kept his studio a creative boutique, and has stuck to his principals throughout the years. I'm not sure who Delna's role model would be, but the Tasmanian Devil is one of her favorite characters. She's a bit like the Taz herself. She is tenacious, strong-willed and never lets anything stand in her way. Without having her as my partner, Bardel would definitely never have been around for the past two decades. ■

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Image from "The Gloaming" by Andy Huang



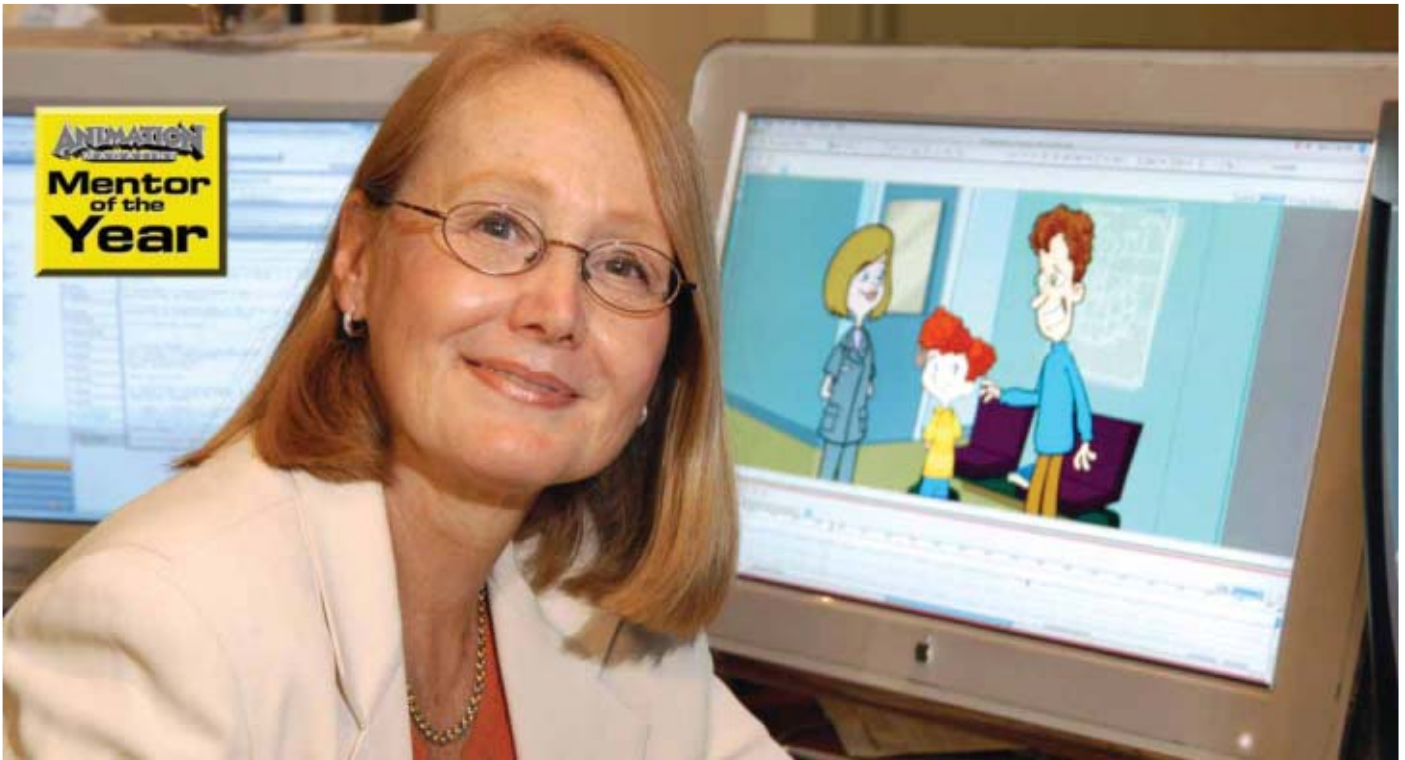
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Animation Magazine's Mentor of the Year:

Joan Vogelsang CEO + President Toon Boom Animation

There are few people working in the global animation community who receive the kind of admiration and respect enjoyed by Toon Boom's much-loved president and CEO, Joan Vogelsang. (Those of you who haven't made her acquaintance should make an effort this year. You'll be very impressed!) This diminutive and fiercely intelligent woman has taken her company to amazing heights in the eventful decade that she's been its leader.

While the Montreal-based outfit's various animation applications continue to cater to the needs of professional animators, students, teachers, hobbyists and children, Joan has become something of an ambassador for animation around the world. As she tirelessly travels to distant corners of the world, she has been able to inspire and touch numerous lives, while allowing sharp minds to imagine a better world through global cooperation.

"It is an honor to travel the world and present the great benefits of building an animation industry in countries where it is non-existent or very small," says Joan in a recent e-mail exchange. "By getting the right stakeholders in place from the education and business sides, we can carve a niche in these emerging markets and at the end of the day, create jobs for a part of their population. By giving back, we receive morally and emotionally while ensuring a win-win situation for all involved."

Many of her colleagues and friends seem to look at Joan's energy and spirit with awe. "When Joan visits us in Cape Town, we talk very little about her software, and a great deal about animation," says Matthew Brown, head of features and drama at South Africa's Clockwork Zoo. "The software sells itself, but Joan has given our industry so much more."

As Dhiren Shah, managing partner

of Rahul Commerce and Toon Boom's Indian distributor notes, "Joan is the Indian ambassador for animation! She is more Indian than Western; she has been to India over 20 times in the past 10 years. Her energy on the field is truly unparalleled. My company and I have benefited both financially and spiritually because of her!"

Nelson Shin, CEO of South Korean animation company AKOM Productions puts it this way: "Joan may be physically small, but she's one of the most powerful, talented leaders of the I.T. industry in the world—and yet, she's the also the sweetest lady I've ever met!"

Throughout the years, Toon Boom's client base has ranged from major studios such as Warner Bros., Paramount and Nelvana to indie houses such as Mercury Filmworks, Alphanim, Cosgrove Hall and Cromosoma. In fact, some of the top 2D animated features of the past few years—*The Triplets of Belleville*, *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* and *The Simpsons Movie*—have all used Toon Boom's technology in their production pipelines. The company's wide selection of products—Studio, Harmony, Digital Pro, Storyboard, Animate and Flip Boom, to name a recent few—have come to the aid of enterprising professionals and toon lovers in over 85 countries around the world. Not surprisingly, Toon Boom was awarded a Primetime Emmy Engineering Award for its contri-

butions to the art and business of TV animation in 2005.

Joan's career prior to Toon Boom included successful runs at IBM, Hitachi, Philips and QSound. She has been uniquely prepared to face the challenges of the international marketplace. "It's crucial to focus on the things to be done and the objectives to be met in order to overcome the challenges in our business," she says. "You also have to have a passion for the animation industry."

She cites several reasons behind Toon Boom's leading position in the 2D solution market. "Beyond the leading animation capabilities, we offer a strong pipeline that enables customers to operate internationally and create multiple unique styles. The Toon Boom animation pipeline facilitates the whole production process and contributes to making our customers successful."

Taking Toon Boom through a restructuring a few years back was one of Joan's toughest challenges. However, she says thanks to the support of key customers, the company managed to come through stronger and has posted a 25 percent growth since then.

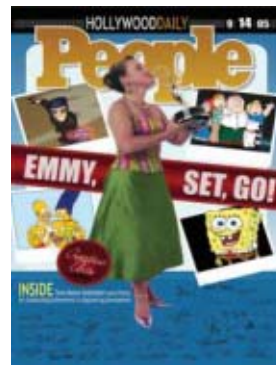
So what does this inspiring woman do when she's not helping animators set up their projects all over the world? "I go to the gym to take my mind off of things, and I also enjoy spending time at the cottage, where I paddle on a stream and take time to enjoy nature and the sights and sounds of bird sanctuaries."

When asked about the lessons she has learned along the way, Joan sticks with the timeless basics, "We are working in a global industry. Having an inter-

national perspective is critically important to be successful. You have to keep a high standard in terms of support excellence for your customer base as well as quality products. It's so important to foster a team that understands the needs of the customers as well as acting as the glue between the animation players. Surround yourself with the best of the breed. Decide what you want, then stay focused and work hard. A misstep can be a valuable lesson learned. Don't dwell on the negative."

As far as her plans for Toon Boom's next 10 years are concerned, she says, "I hope to continue to grow as a successful global player." With such a dynamic and visionary leader, we can't possibly see any other options for the company. ■

For more info, visit www.toonboom.com.



Joan's Tips for Animators:

"There are lots of opportunities within the industry, so animators should truly focus on their passion. Don't constrain yourself to a certain style or output like TV as there are many applications for animation, such as medical, religion, science, music, social, etc. Some people think too small, they have the tendency to operate their business with a very centric view on their company or immediate geography. They miss the incredible opportunities the global industry has to offer."

"Joan has contributed tremendously to the new growth and possibilities for animation in the Caribbean region. She is a personal mentor and I respect and admire her tenacity and her belief in non-traditional methods and applications and, yes, she is a woman. Joan is providing an alternative to the oil and gas economy here in the Caribbean and in so doing empowering people at the same time."

—Camille Abrahams, program administrator for animation, University of Trinidad & Tobago, and fest director/founder of Animae Caribe

"When I was traveling the world promoting DQE almost a decade back, Joan was one of my truest friends and guides. I still remember how we put our first show reel together using Toon Boom, and how it was greeted with a big round of applause when we viewed it in her office with her team... She will always be a special friend and a guide for me and for our group."

—Tapaas Chakravarti, CEO, DQ Entertainment





Animation Magazine's European Producer of the Year: Ralph Christians CEO, Magma Animation

Mention the name Ralph Christians at animation events and festivals in Europe and you'll see a lot of faces light up. The talented producer of recent CG-animated features such as *Niko and the Way to the Stars* and *The Ugly Duckling and Me* has become a regular fixture at the annual Cartoon Forum and Cartoon Movie sessions, often delighting the attendees with his trademark humor and unique pitching skills.

Viewed by many as the éminence grise of the Euro toon community, Christians has worn many hats through the years. The German-born Renaissance man studied social sciences and communications in school and began his career as an editor of a satirical magazine and producer of investigative documentaries for German public TV during the late '70s and early '80s. In 1984, he set up Magma in Germany and moved the company's headquarters to Galway, Ireland, 10 years later.

While Magma has a successful live-action production branch, Christians has devoted much of his time in the past couple of decades to strengthening the TV and feature animation business in Europe. He believes that the international animation scene is absolutely underestimated, while live-action movies continue to be overestimated!

Delivering TV series as diverse (and some may say eccentric) as *Pigs Next Door*, *The World of Tosh*, *Hans Christian Andersen*, *Derrick*, *Dragon's Rock*, *Zombie Hotel*, *Norman Normal* and *Lilly the Witch*, Christians has been able to navigate the often stormy waters of European financing and co-productions. When asked to come up with a unifying theme that runs through many of Magma's animated projects, he says, "The underdogs are the winners at the end. And they are the nice people!"

When pushed to pick his favorite movies, Christians confesses his love for all French flicks starring Romy Schneider as well as the 1967 classic, *Bonnie and Clyde* (with Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty). "That's because we European

filmmakers are also corner store robbers, the stores are public funds! Because there's nothing in the banks anymore!" he says, tongue firmly planted in cheek. He also loves European cop shows, British sitcoms like *'Allo, 'Allo!* and *The Office*, and FOX TV's *House*.

The successful producer says he has noticed that the biggest mistake animation industry wannabes make is that "they demonstrate technical possibilities, but they don't tell wonderful stories." He certainly managed to do both last year with the runaway success of the CG-animated feature *Niko and the Way to the Stars*. Directed by Kari Juusonen and Michael Hegner, the family film centers on a young reindeer who goes on a quest to find and save his absent father, whom he believes to be a member of the world famous Santa's Elite Flying Forces.

Made with an estimated budget of six million euros, the feature has won several festival awards, performed very well in several European territories and was recently released on DVD in the U.S. as *The Flight Before Christmas* by the Weinstein Company. Christians says there were certain qualities that made the film such a hit in Europe. "It has a contemporary story: A single mom tells her son great stories about his father, and the boy tries to find him," he notes.



All Creatures Great and Small: The CG-animated features *Niko and the Way to the Stars*, *Ugly Duckling and Me* and the upcoming *Bug Muldoon* are some of the most recent projects produced by Magma's Ralph Christians.



Ralph, Ratso and Ugly at *The Ugly Duckling and Me* launch in Ireland.

"Then he realizes a father's value is in his caring nature."

Although Christians says his personal motto is "Just fucking do it," when it comes to being successful in animation, he thinks good storytelling and high-quality animation are the two most important ingredients in Toon Town. "Young people have to make their own experiences," he adds. "You can not teach or preach what to do. That's why you have to give them space for experience! Be an enabler! The way I give back to the community is by producing responsible programs with a high entertainment value!"

When it comes to offering advice for animation biz hopefuls, he says, "Remember to focus on the writing ... or on design ... or become a lawyer! And know that the financing of films is so much more work than the making of the thing!"

In the coming year, Christians will focus his energies on two big CG-animated features, *Bug Muldoon: The Movie* and *Ooops! Noah Is Gone*, for which he's also developing tie-in animated series. He's also producing several animated series including *Dr. Ella*, *Things You Think* and *Simsala Grimm*.

We wrap our interview by asking Christians to reveal a few things people don't often know about him! Luckily, he obliges: "They don't know that I'm a very kind and humorous person behind the strong appearance and the deadpan." He may be joking there, but we aren't quite sure! But we know he really means it when he says, "Being a dedicated father to five wonderful children is the most important thing in life for me." He adds, "Storytelling comes next, then women and soccer." ■

For more info, visit www.magmaworld.com.



Ralph in Cannes, with the *Niko* co-production team.

In Praise of Ralph

"Ralph Christians is a remarkable character; a unique character in a truly *animated* industry, who has always strongly influenced both the creative and the financial side of European animation. He very cleverly relocated from Germany to Ireland so he was always able to be either *Irish* or *German* whenever he needed to be one or the other. Not long ago he began the next step, something I would call *Ralph Network 2.0*, while letting his daughters set up German animation companies together with A-Film. Clever! And smart, this guy!"

—Sebastian Debertin, deputy managing & programming director, KI.KA

"How has Ralph helped me? By finding champagne when I was about to tell the buyer 'I'd very much like to get you champagne, but they just told me they only have wine and beer.' Where the champagne is, there is the deal. I don't know what that tells you but ... when Ralph drinks with me, we have Gin and tonic. Not champagne. (But, we DID sign a *Niko* deal!)"

—Petteri Pasanen, director, *Niko and the Way to the Stars*

"Ralph and his team's creative contributions always enhance the quality of European productions tremendously. Their scripting work is of a high American standard with a European flavor."

—Oliver Schablitzki, VP of Nickelodeon/MTV Networks, Germany

"Ralph has been a key figure in pushing the animation industry in Ireland and throughout Europe. I've sat with him at many an airport cafe or Cannes bar, late into the night, receiving pearls of wisdom as to how to get animated shows off the ground. He has always been very generous with advice for the young and inexperienced (although I can't really pull the young card anymore, sad to say). On top of that, his sense of humor makes his pitches at the Cartoon Forum a must see every year."

—Paul Young, co-founder and managing director, Cartoon Saloon

"When I was invited to Ralph's home in Ireland for a production meeting, I was amazed to discover that he lived in the converted remains of an old castle! I then understood why Ralph has become a master of animated stories. His whole life is an animated story! Congratulations, Ralph, on a hugely successful contribution to the world of animation—in work and in life."

—Noel Price, exec producer, Southern Star Entertainment

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Drinky Crow Spreads Its Wings

How Tony Millionaire's graphic adventures about a drunk bird and his sexed-up monkey pal inspired a fantastic new toon. **by Ramin Zahed**

This must be the year of the born-to-be-bad animated character. Although we all know that cartoons have never been just for kids, this past fall season has ushered in a whole new set of misbehaving toons. Following the debut of HBO's *The Life and Times of Tim* and [adult swim]'s gloriously outrageous *Superjail!* series, a new adaptation of Tony Millionaire's twisted comic series *Maakies* arrives on Cartoon Network's late-night block this month.

Titled *The Drinky Crow Show*, the clever series is created, exec produced and art directed by Millionaire and co-written and exec-produced by Eric Kaplan (*The Big Bang Theory*, *The Flight of the Conchords*, *Futurama*, *Late Show with David Letterman*). It's certainly the

kind of sophisticated, risqué and great-looking project that would appeal to fans of Ralph Bakshi, Robert Crumb and John Kricfalusi. The twisted world of the alcoholic, depressed crow and his libidinous buddy, Uncle Gabby, certainly has a lot of eyebrow-raising undertones and grown-up situations, but it



also shines with the influences of early comics such as George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* and Elzie Segar's *Popeye the Sailor* Sunday funnies.

Millionaire, a Boston native who lives in Pasadena with his wife and two young daughters these days, says his love for the art form began at an early age thanks to his grandfather, who was a friend of cartoonist Roy Crane and had a sizable Sunday comics collection. "I remember I was always reading Charlie Brown and Snoopy in the back of my school books," he says. "Every time I found newspapers, I was ripping through them to get to the comics pages. Then as I grew older, I discovered Robert Crumb and the super-violent, funny and beautifully drawn underground comics of S. Clay Wilson."

The inspiration for his *Maakies* comic strip—which was reportedly first drawn on a cocktail napkin at a local bar in 1994—came from his own hard-drinking days. "Seriously, it's all my own drunk life in New York," he explains. "I grew up drawing ships, I was raised in Gloucester, Mass., and my family had a gallery right on the water. I just applied those drawings to my own drunken life! I just remember how depressing it used to be."

In the late '90s, Robert Smigel produced six Flash-animated episodes of *Maakies* for Saturday Night Live's TV *Funhouse* segment, but only two ended up airing. His comic continued to generate a lot of interest within the animation industry. "About three years ago, Nick Weindenfeld [Adult Swim's exec in charge of development] called me and said he wanted to have a meeting and that he was very interested in doing the show. He seemed to be very enthusiastic and we teamed up with Eric Kaplan (who runs his own CG anima-



Tony Millionaire

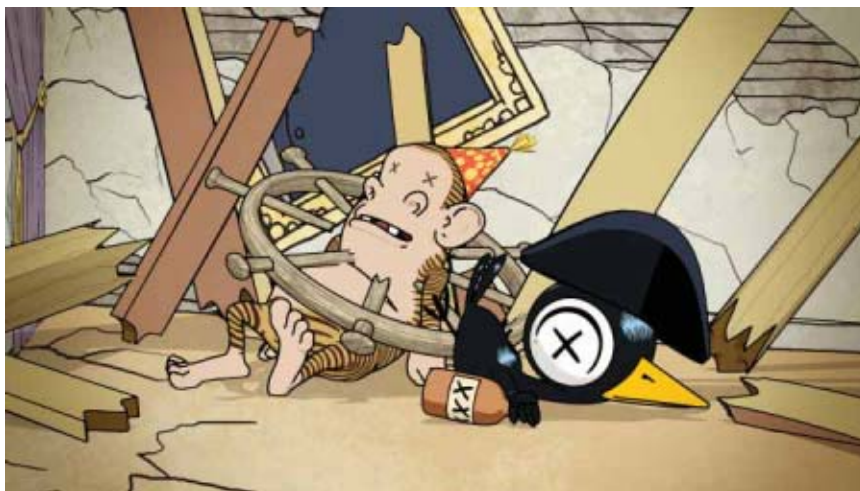


Eric Kaplan

tion studio called Mirari Films in Romania) and Dino Stamatoopoulos (Moral Orel), who does the voice of Drinky Crow."

Lovechild of Popeye and Venture Bros.

Millionaire says it was crucial for the show to look like a Sunday newspaper comic rather than a plastic-y CG-animated cartoon. "The studio uses Maya and jazzes it up with some special effects," notes the cartoonist. "We decided to take the drawings, my textures and put them on 3D models," he explains. Part of Kaplan's artistic team is based in Studio City, Calif. "The way it works is that I take the script and do pencil sketches, thumbnail sketches of every scene and then turn them over to storyboard artist Ricky Garduno (Mu-



"Seriously, it's all my own drunk life in New York. Plus I grew up drawing ships ... I just applied those drawings to my own drunk-en life! I just remember how depressing it all used to be."

—The Drinky Crow Show/Maakies creator Tony Millionaire

cha Lucha, El Tigre) and Matt Danner (Spümcø regular, *Out of Jimmy's Head*) who is the director. Character designer Ray Morelli takes my drawings into model. When I try and do turnarounds, they never look right!"

Then, when the Romanian team sends the samples back, they fine-tune the material until everything looks just right. The voice recording process comes after that. "It took us from February to September—six months to do the the first four or five episodes. Now that we've established the style, it is a bit easier." To date, 10 15-minute episodes—which make up the first season of the show—have been delivered. (Incidentally, as if the show needed any more hipster cred, *Drinky Crow's* catchy theme song is performed by New York band They Might Be Giants.)

Although you might think that getting the mature content of the comic past the censors would have posed some problems, Millionaire says the [adult swim] team was extremely en-

couraging. "When we first sent the script, we asked them, 'Should we tone it down?' and Nick [Weidenfeld] said, 'Hey, can you tone it up?' We have some script guidelines, but it's amazing what you can get away with. You can get really dirty with the right type of comedy!"

Millionaire is quick to point out that the biggest challenge was staying true to the spirit of the comic while establishing the show's own voice. "I stalked Eric Kaplan for weeks: I'd go over to his house, walk around the river with him. I'd use stories from my friends to keep it personal. The great thing about it is that Eric has a lot of writing chops behind him, he read all the comics, so the basic point for us was to tell the story right and get to the heart of the characters. I think Eric really nailed it when he said, 'Crow drinks because his heart is broken.'"

Since Millionaire is also the show's art director, he has control over the look of the show. "That's the great thing about

it," he admits. "We can go back and forth until everything is right."

In addition to *Maakies*, Millionaire is also famous for another comic creation, the Dark Horse series *Sock Monkey*, which, like *Maakies*, has won the prestigious Eisner Award.

"*Sock Monkey* is me trying to be more poetic, looking at the bright side, remembering the things that used to delight me as a child," Millionaire says. "However, eventually my dream is to have a plush Drinky Crow doll on every college girl's bed in America," he adds.

Blasts from the Past

When asked about his favorite animated influences, he singles out Bugs Bunny, Rocky and Bullwinkle, and Deputy Dawg. "I loved the slowness and the sound of Deputy Dawg's voice, although I know the animation was choppy," he explains. "Those Warner Bros. toons, they had such great comic timing. They did so much with a pause and a look. I also love *Metalocalypse* and *The Venture Bros*. Because of my two girls, I always hope *SpongeBob* is on when we watch together. That is absolutely classic stuff."

So what kind of advice does he have for dreamers who would like to test the waters of adult animation? "Give up now!" he says. "Seriously, if you're not totally driven and ready to dedicate your life to this kind of work, you should stay away from it ... If you are, then just keep drawing, man. Just keep drawing!"

Of course, we have to save the most obvious question for last. Now that he's given up the hard stuff, what does he like to drink these days to take the edge off? "Beer, brother, beer!" he laughs. "I am sticking straight to Budweiser, the king of beers—and give it to me fresh out of the can!" ■

The Drinky Crow Show premieres at 12:15 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 23, on Cartoon Network's [adult swim].

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Animating a Poetic Vision

A new adaptation of Dylan Thomas's *A Child's Christmas in Wales* is an early holiday gift for traditional animation lovers. **by Ramin Zahed**

"One Christmas was so much like another, in those years around the sea-town corner now and out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep ..." That's how the beloved Welsh poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) began his famous holiday poem *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. This year, his words have inspired a new half-hour animated special, directed by Dave Unwin and produced by Michael Jeffrey, which will premiere on S4C (Welsh TV) on Christmas day.

The mostly hand-drawn animated project has been a labor of love for Jeffrey, who formed his company Brave New World specifically to launch traditionally animated projects, and director Unwin, who has helmed award-winning toons such as *Father Christmas*, *The Little Reindeer*, *The Wind in the Willows* and *Horrid Henry* in the past. Catrin Unwin, who co-produced Oscar-nominated *Famous Fred* and worked on Joanna Quinn's animation *Dream and Desires: Family Ties*, is the animation producer. *Brothers & Sisters* star Matthew Rhys narrates the project.

Jeffrey acquired the rights to Thomas's poignant poem about three years ago and spent the first year fine-tuning the treatment. "When I said I wanted to make a high-budget, half-hour animated special people thought it could not be done," he says. "I managed to

convince people that we were on to something very special and eventually it broke through. We had to find a way of telling the story which was more interesting than just having the existing text read with accompanying pictures," explains Jeffrey, who was successful in convincing S4C to fund the project to the tune of £600,000 (about \$940,000).

The special includes a live-action intro and conclusion, which is intended to draw in modern audiences to what is clearly a period piece. "Once into animation we created a basic style to carry the narrative thread, but then broke out of that for set pieces which had their own, unique look within the film," Unwin explains. "Although the animation is mainly 2D this did allow us to incorporate some 3D into the mix as well. Overall the film does have a traditional look and feel though, which seemed suitable for a story that has become a classic of childhood literature."

The team began production about a year ago. The bulk of the animation was done in Cardiff, with additional help pro-

vided by Sandman Animation in China. Jeffrey says all in all, about 80 people worked on the special. The multi-talented producer also composed the toon's wonderful orchestral score. He formed a 35-piece orchestra which he says he'll re-assemble for his future toons.

Jeffrey believes that the magic Thomas conjured up in his writing lends itself beautifully to animation. "He wasn't afraid to run with fantastical ideas like the appearance of two hippos on a Swansea [Thomas's hometown] high street, or mermaids and ghosts. The idea of snow is important in the book—that chimes very nicely with the idea of Christmas, which is romanticized and idealized but not sentimental."

When asked to comment on the big global scene today, Unwin opines that there is more good animation done now than ever before and that there are more ways to get the projects seen. "I like storytelling, so I like films with a narrative structure," he says. "Coming from a 'classical' animation background I admire Michael Dudok de Wit's *Father and Daughter* hugely, but I also like Luis Cook's *The Pierce Sisters*, which is wholly different in style and technique."

For now, against all odds, *A Child's Christmas* is set to introduce a new generation to the Thomas classic, and Jeffrey plans to show the project to international distributors in the next few months. (Parthenon is handling international sales.) "S4C seem to take children's TV seriously and can lay their hands on commissioning fees," adds Jeffrey. He's indeed proud of the fact that his project follows in the footsteps of great British TV specials such as TVC's *The Snowman*, *The Wind in the Willows* and *The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends*. "I love traditional animation," says Jeffrey. "Children and adults do, too. It is unfashionable at the moment but I would like to play a part in bringing it back by making more films over the next 10 years. I am fond of the look of the film. It's truly beautiful." ■



Dave Unwin



Michael Jeffrey





Meet Disney's New Chow Hound!

Move over, Chef Ramsey: There's a new top dog in town and his name is ZeFronk!

When it comes to simple ideas that work beautifully in the world of children's animation, a French-accented wiener dog who hosts his own cooking show is right up there with, say, a toon about a goofy absorbent sponge hero. That's why illustrator Ethan Long knew he was on to something when the clever concept came to him out of the blue!

"I'd been trying to develop a bunch of stuff, and it had been a frustrating experience," recalls Long during a phone conversation from his home in Orlando, Florida. "Then one morning, I woke up with this funny voice in my head, 'I'm LeFronk, I'm LeFronk,' so I ran to my studio and put together this illustration of this dog (it was a Chihuahua at the time!) wearing a chef's hat. My friend said it would be funnier with a wiener dog, so I made a tiny skit with this dog who makes these simple dishes, like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and showed it to my book agent. Then, we showed it to Disney, and from that point on, things took off!"

Long's idea evolved into a Flash-animated short-form series called *Tasty Time with ZeFronk*, which debuted last month during the Playhouse Disney preschool

block of Disney Channel. The show centers on a French Dachshund who hosts a cooking show from his own doghouse, creating healthy snacks for kids, assisted by a bird sous-chef named Sue. To make things a little more interesting, this Wolfgang Puck of the pooch community is tormented constantly by the sneaky neighbor cat, Dom, who just loves to get his paws on ZeFronk's delicious creations!

A graduate of Florida's prestigious Ringling College of Art and Design, Long has made a solid career out of illustrating children's books. However, he says, he got the animation bug one day when he was shopping for diapers for his kid at the neighborhood grocery store! "I spotted a *SpongeBob* video there by the register, and I saw that it was created by Stephen Hillenburg, and I thought, hey, I could do that!"

Ten episodes of the series have been produced to date, with the help of L.A.-based studio OddBot. "I can't think of a more entertaining animated cooking show than *ZeFronk*!" says OddBot's president and creative director Christopher Hamilton, who has worked on several Disney Channel shows in the past. "The look of the

show is unique because we mixed 2D/Flash character animation with real photographs of ZeFronk's ingredients and his finished entrees. It was a challenge to make these two mediums work together, but we're extremely happy with the final look."

Hamilton says once the script was in hand, OddBot animated and delivered the first short in about five to six weeks. "Normally, we would be involved in creating the look of a show, but ZeFronk was a bit different. By the time we started the project, Ethan had character and background designs already finalized. So that really helped us get a jumpstart on production."

For now, Mr. Long is happy to see his talented dog delight young chefs-in-training on Disney Channel. He's also developing a new series about farm animals with super powers

called *Farm Force* in conjunction with L.A.-based Porchlight Entertainment. The show's pilot won the Nicktoons Film Festival Viewer's Choice Award in 2005. In addition, Long is also working on several more book ideas and helping his wife set up her own fashion store (Heather's Handmade Goods) in Orlando.

"I think what I've learned in this process is that it's important to simplify your life and to simplify your ideas," he adds. "Don't be afraid to let go of the bad ones and start all over again!"

Long adds that he loves to watch ZeFronk's adventures with his three children (ages five, six and 13). "They've seen the show go through all its different phases from original drawings, through animatic to the addition of music, etc. My daughter actually helped color the original kitchen! I think they really love it when he gets upset! Myself, I just like the idea of a wiener dog ruling the world!" ■

***Tasty Time with ZeFronk* airs weekdays at 9:25 a.m. (8:25 a.m. Central) on Playhouse Disney. For more info, visit atv.disney.go.com/playhouse/tastytimewithzepronk.**

The Padded Cel

by Robby London



Memo to 2008: Don't let the door hit you on the way out!

Traditionally in this year-end issue, *The Padded Cel* offers its highly coveted Holiday Gift Guide For Animators. But this holiday season we could only think of one animation-themed gift anyone can actually afford—and you are holding it in your hands. An issue of *Animation Magazine* represents that rare gift you can actually wrap in itself! (No doubt many of you are already thinking of other ancillary uses for this page.)

Now that we've comprehensively addressed gifting dilemmas, we can turn our focus to the year past. 2008 felt like a watershed year. Clearly there has been plenty of water shed from our collective tear ducts as the storm clouds of recession gathered. (Demonstrating our ninja-level mastery of economics, we "called" the recession in our April column. Unfortunately, President Bush let his subscription lapse in March.) But if there's anything we in animation know and understand, it's cycles. So, with cycles in mind, let's review the cycle that was year 2008 in animation.

We always start our animation year in February. January is spent recovering from the holidays. "NATPE?" Did I hear someone say NATPE?, that January TV distribution conference of dwindling relevance to animation? Hmm, must've missed it while I was in eggnog rehab. February, the Kidscreen Conference continued to target starry-eyed wannabe animation producers seeking to network with ... networks. This while the networks were busy networking with Broadway, Bloomingdales, Rockefeller Center, Central

Park and Peter Lugar's Steakhouse. February also saw the end of the WGA strike—no small relief to animation writers who once again had the residual-free, lower paying animation-writing ghetto all to themselves.

Ah, spring! The dual ordeals of MIP-TV (Cannes) and Cartoons on the Bay (this year in Salerno, Italy). They're dirty jobs but someone had to do them. We think it's time artists who spent their spring slacking off, frolicking and being overpaid to indulge their every creative whim and personal vision (14 hours a day, seven days a week) started to appreciate the sacrifices and indignities that their long-suffering bosses are forced to endure on the artists' behalf! (I forget ... Annecy also happens in June!)

As always, summer heralded the release of large-budget, larger-ego animated features. DreamWorks Animation's *Kung Fu Panda* chopped some very lucrative saki. And leave it to Pixar (*WALL•E*) to once again completely depress those of us working in TV animation who are obliged to produce an entire series with the time and money Pixar uses to produce one scene. Well, at least *Space Chimps* and *Igor* flopped around long enough (barely) to mitigate the TV inferiority complex.

Speaking of TV, this summer saw the acquisition and subsequent ethnic cleansing of 25-year animation stalwart DIC Entertainment—gobbled up by Cookie Jar and all but vanished overnight. R.I.P. DIC.

Fall is a time of reflection and nostalgia, and 2008 was no exception. *King of the Hill* was final-

ly permanently dethroned after 13 seasons of really grating animation and really funny scripts. (Hmm, maybe those WGA wages and residuals do buy something after all?) And as Halloween approached, there were some scary happenings: Russia moved to ban *South Park*, scientists unveiled a real life "invisibility cloak" (instantly devaluing effects animators) and the Supreme Court once again took up the cataclysmic threat to societal order constituted by "obscene" language on television. I don't know about you, but censors always get me all warm, fuzzy and gratuitously scatological.

Now with Halloween in the rear-view mirror, we have more neurotic animals doing boffo business at the box office, thanks to DreamWorks' *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* and Disney's *Bolt*. Mickey Mouse, who hit the big 80th milestone this year, must be quite proud. Meanwhile, in the real world, folks are already getting ready for the holidays. Someone please wake me in February. And, for you aspiring animation producers—there is *still* a chance to pitch those network honchos—while you wrap their holiday gifts at Macy's! As a former DIC employee, I look forward to working alongside you. ■

Robby London is an award-winning writer and TV animation producer who is pitching a new series about a flying squirrel, a moose and a very depressed mayor in Alaska.



Some of our favorite toon characters celebrate the arrival of 2009!

Illustration by Mercedes Willigan

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A Well-Rounded Effect: The alien's transportation device— a.k.a. The Sphere—realized by Weta Digital (led by Kevin Rafferty and Chris White), was based on a computer sim for all of its 50-plus shots, all made up of Chaos which is unique to every camera angle.

Crafting a Sphere for Klaatu (Version 2.0)

Jeffrey Okun discusses the philosophy behind the alien visitor's spaceship in the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. by Ron Magid

Visual effects supervisor Jeffrey A. Okun can't stand spheres. The aversion began 10 years ago, whilst creating effects imagery for *Sphere*, and was subsequently reinforced by his work on *Red Planet*. So the million dollar question is what possessed Okun, whose previous credits include the more earth-bound *Blood Diamond* and *The Last Samurai*, to tackle a remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, when the script called for a spherical spaceship? "I thought I could reason it out of them," Okun says. "I wanted to go back to the original spaceship because that's so iconic and cool and nobody has used that shape since."

But the more he thought about it, the more Okun realized that the last thing the movie's alien hero, Klaatu (Keanu Reeves), needed was an endless flight aboard a spaceship. "If you're from an advanced race, the guardians of the universe, why would you be locked into this concept that you're going to be stuck inside this thing for millions of years as you travel at the speed of light from place A to place B?"

Although there had been a fair amount

of brainstorming before Okun came on, he had a fresh idea. At an early production meeting with director Scott Derrickson, producers Erwin Stoff and Greg Goodman, cinematographer David Tattersall, production designer David Brisbin, visual effects producer Tom Boland, and first A.D. Pete Whyte, Okun posed a bizarre question: If you've never seen a chair before, except in a picture from one angle and one plane, then went to a warehouse filled with chairs, tables and other things, you'd still recognize chairs when you saw them. How does the human brain leap to that next step?

"I like to use that exercise to open up different ways of thinking," Okun says. "The discussion began, and the watershed moment for me was when we were looking at David Brisbin's explorations for the spaceship where it was like a giant drop of water or ball of light, and I asked, 'What if it wasn't a spaceship, what if it was just how they get from there to here?' After making fun of me, as I always invite people to do, everybody suddenly got excited about the opportunity to really

look at this from a different point of view, one that might be more realistic." He continues enthusiastically, "To avoid space travel, we'd all want to be able to teleport; if you can't teleport, the next best thing is an old concept from *A Wrinkle in Time*, the tesseract, which folds space over. So, maybe the spaceship's not a spaceship, it's just a portal and when it's in place, you just step through it. So that's why there's no spaceship, per se, in the movie."

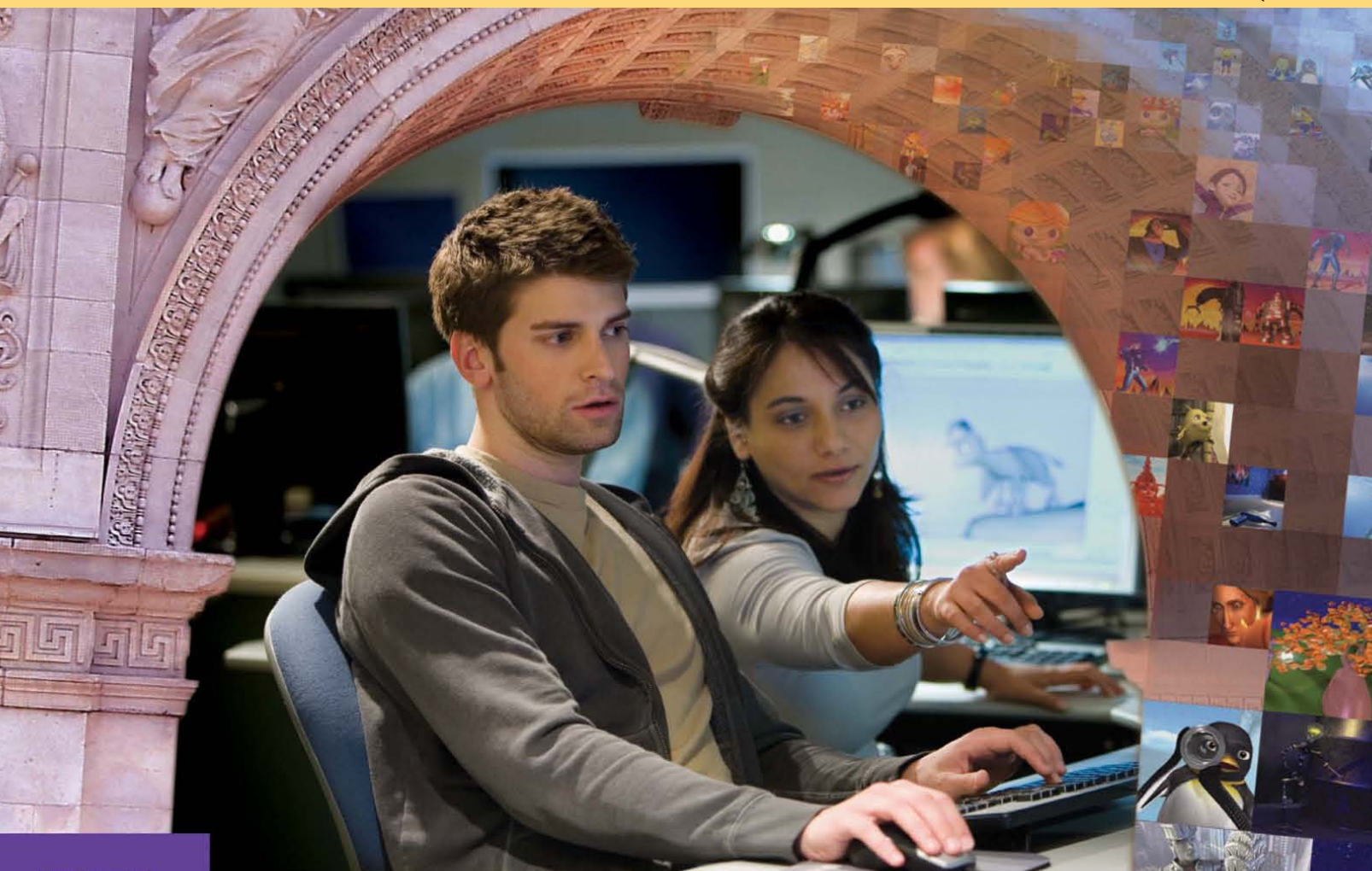
That evolutionary leap from spaceship to portal propelled Derrickson's team into an exploration of "alien future technology," which helped with the design of the entire film. Okun and his effects houses—including Weta Digital, Cinesite London, Flash Film Works, Hammerhead, Hydraulx, Image Engine and CosFX—extrapolated today's scientific realities, like Stephen Hawking's theories of the universe, micro-sized laboratories and atom-sized tubes, over hundreds of years. "After we stopped thinking so linearly," Okun says, "we could feel our brains growing."

There was just one problem. The portal remained a giant sphere, despite Okun's warnings of the dangers that shape posed: "I said spheres are problematic. It's the most common natural shape and the most difficult to deal with because



Jeffrey Okun

continued on page 64



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Take Me to Your Leader: Keanu Reeves stars as the well-meaning alien visitor Klaatu in the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

spheres have no scale and no perspective. You're asking for a world of trouble."

Klaatu's interplanetary craft took a year to hone: "I started on the film in April, 2007 and we actually physically solved what it was going to look like in April, 2008. We began by exploring using water, various kinds of gases and light, all of which look beautiful but as we began to build it for real, we asked a lot of questions like what the hell does this thing look like? It's a disturbance that is not a disturbance, but is disruptive. We ended up taking a page out of nature: How do clouds hang together? Where does lightning come from? Then we applied that to our re-designed Sphere. There's actually a kind of logic to it."

Ultimately, the Sphere envisioned by Okun and realized by the Weta Digital team (Kevin Rafferty and Chris White) couldn't be conventionally modeled: It had to be based on a computer simulation for all of its 50-plus shots. "The sphere is essentially made up out of Chaos, and Chaos is unique to every camera angle," Okun explains. "We shot lots of reference—skies, clouds and special mixtures of gasses suspended in liquid—but in the end, it was all simulated, no textures involved."

Okun explains that there's one single sequence in the film that took over a month to render. That's why the vfx team had to figure out a way to patch any errors without having to re-run the whole simulation and, better yet, come up with tricks that will help them with the visuals before running the full sphere simulation.



"I said spheres are problematic. It's the most common natural shape and the most difficult to deal with because spheres have no scale and no perspective. You're asking for a world of trouble."

—Jeffrey A. Okun, vfx supervisor, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*

He adds, "Once the sphere was rendered, we found ways to do interior lighting that was crucial to the look of the sphere. We used fully animatable 'tight lights' which we inserted into the depths of the sphere, which was made up of so many layers there wasn't anything for the light to react to. Lastly we added distortion on top to make the Sphere do things it wasn't doing that we needed it to do. It's kind of revolutionary in a crazy kind of backwards way."

Beyond Klaatu's Sphere, Okun and company added breadth and depth to

the military response and re-imagined Gort (Klaatu's robot bodyguard) to the tune of 500 total fx shots. Along the way, they achieved on film what the pioneers of science fiction, Verne and Wells, did on paper: They pushed the boundaries of science into today's fiction, which may well become the reality of tomorrow.

Which is A-OK with Okun, so long as he can avoid spheres. "I hope I never have to work with one again," he jokes. ■

20th Century Fox's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* lands in U.S. theaters on December 12.

VFS student work by Zack Mathew



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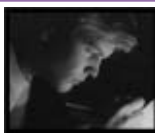
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Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



SplutterFish's Brazil V.2

Sometimes it seems as if I've been working with Brazil's rendering software since it was merely a twinkle in its creators' eyes. The latest release of the solution, V2.0, has truly been a long time coming. But, you have to give SplutterFish credit for not releasing a product before they feel it's completely ready—despite industry pressure to do so. The risk they take, however, is potentially allowing their competition like V-Ray and mental ray to gain a foothold in their market. However, with a long list of improvements and feature additions, I think the new release will certainly make up for lost time.

The primary features that I know I've been clamoring for since V1.2 has been 3D Motion Blur and Displacement, as both are extremely important for full-on film production. The good news is that in V2, we've got both, with some nice little features like particle blur support and camera controls to allow for adjusting the bias of where the blur is calculated. Displacement also comes with some choices between analytic and height field depending on your needs between shallow, subtle displacement or a faster calculation with heavier scenes, respectively.

All of the performance improvements have kept up with the Joneses by adapting to 64-bit operating systems, pushing multi-threading even beyond the capacity of its host, 3ds Max, and they have redone the Quasi-Monte Carlo sampling core to speed up render times while avoiding telltale flickering when calculating global illumination.

It seems like everything in Brazil has had an overhaul—from textures, materials and implicit objects to cameras and lights—frankly, way more than I can fit into this review.

It'll have to fill the gap that it left open during the development cycle, but I can tell you first hand: I was working on a scene that I was rendering with another engine, and was getting crippling render times. I took a few moments to switch over to Brazil r/s V2, changed the textures and my lights, and I was getting test renders in seconds—fast enough to make tweaks and adjust, before hitting render. Whereas before, I was waiting 10 minutes for a 320 x 240 image. I can definitely say that Brazil was invaluable. My name is Todd Perry, and I support this message!

Website: www.splutterfish.com

Price: Workstation, \$995; Rendernode, \$175 (education and volume discounts available.)

Autodesk Mudbox 2009

The useful 3D sculpting tool Mudbox was created by Skymatter, a software development outfit founded by former artists of Weta Digital, where it was first used to produce the 2005 remake of King Kong. Within one generation, Autodesk scooped up the tool and incorporated it into its ever growing family of visual effects tools.

In Mudbox 2009, many performance features have been added along with some really nice eye candy. At its core, Mudbox is a 3D sculpting tool best utilized with the help of a Wacom tablet. The methodology is similar to Photoshop in that the sculpting can be divided by layers, so that you can put wrinkles on one layer, skin pores on another, gunshot wounds on another, etc. This workflow is beneficial because it allows multiple artists to work on different aspects of the modeling, and the progress can be merged into one master model. Driving all of this is a sleek set of code that makes the interface fly with speed and responsiveness.

Texture-painting tools have been added so that users can paint directly on the model, separating out to paint on the diffuse, specular, bump and reflections. You can paint directly on the surface with the UVs guiding the way, or you can switch to projecting stencil images from the camera—allowing for a great deal of control when painting details. The painting can use multiple maps across. On top of this, the response is blazing fast, and Mudbox completely respects the pressure from the Wacom tablet.

Lighting and shading have also been added including ambient occlusion, which, if you have a powerful enough display card, can be shown in near real-time. This intuitive addition is extremely important because the modeler really has to see his model in lighting conditions before it gets passed down the line.

The model can be sculpted with tens of millions of polies, but since that isn't practical for an animation/lighting pipeline, the detailed model results can be exported to displacement and normal maps that can be applied in the shaders—giving the artists downstream relief that they don't have to deal with that kind of data load.

I'm happy to see these advances even after Autodesk purchased Mudbox: It shows that the team is still trying to push the envelope and is enthused about having the big corporation behind them!

Website: www.autodesk.com/mudbox



Price: \$745 (2009 full version); \$450 (upgrade, basic); \$375 (upgrade, Mudbox Pro)

Toon Boom's Animate

Almost anyone who works in animation these days knows that Toon Boom has become the industry standard when it comes to paperless 2D animation (or paper to paperless 2D animation!). The Montreal-based company's current products, Storyboard Pro and Digital Pro, are used in productions ranging from small boutique houses to large production facilities. While Digital Pro sets the foundation for production, Toon Boom understands that in order to have future productions, there must be a harvest of new talent. This is what the shop's newest product, Animate, was meant to fulfill—and it does so in two different ways.

Animate uses all the technology within the other products—vector-based line work, 3D multi-planes, 16-bit color output, inverse kinematic hierarchies for segmented characters—really a list that goes on and on, and couldn't even hope to fit into the scope of this article. But you can be confident that everything is there for your animation needs, as well as many things that you hadn't even considered. So, the technology is there, but stripped of the tools that might be a little more animation-studio-centric. Animate focuses on the nuts and bolts of animation.

So why is this a benefit and why shouldn't you just opt for Digital Pro? Cost is one consideration. But the truth is that the professional animator wants to animate. They want to be able to ramp up on the tools quickly, and dive right in to creativity. Furthermore, animation schools need to be able to bring their students up to speed quickly and effectively so that focus can be refined to animation techniques and theory rather than "how-to-import-a-drawing."

Animate provides a familiar environment that fits in well with the Adobe tool mindset, so for artists familiar with Photoshop and Flash, there isn't much of a jump. Pros who have worked in the Digital Pro pipeline will also be familiar. However, catering to individuals and students does not denigrate the capability of the product in the least. It simply "propels the animation" just as the tool's marketing material says it does!

To further Toon Boom's dedication to fostering new talent, they have generated online teaching aides and curriculum suggestions for animation institutions. Website: www.toonboom.com/products/animate

Price: \$699.99; \$399.99 (crossgrade from TBS) ■



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On September 10, 2008, the Superior Court of the County of Los Angeles, California approved a class action settlement in *William Webb v. Directors Guild of America, Inc.*, Case No. BC 352621, and authorized this notice.

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The lawsuit arose as a result of the collection and distribution to directors of levies on blank DVDs and tapes in several foreign nations. Various countries have adopted laws imposing these levies, which are designed to provide compensation to rights holders, including directors of motion pictures and other works. The lawsuit claimed that DGA has failed to properly distribute foreign levies to non-DGA members. DGA denies all allegations and has asserted many defenses. The settlement is not an admission of wrongdoing or an indication that any law was violated.

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DGA will also engage an accounting firm to conduct an annual review of its foreign levy program. The results of these reviews will be posted on DGA's website.

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Shaping a New Generation of Artists

Classic stop-motion traditions thrive at CalArts' Experimental Animation Program.

by Ellen Wolff

Every year, around Halloween, Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* screens in theaters, and moviegoers understand the enduring appeal of stop-motion animation once again. Disney's perennial release of this 15-year-old classic also reminds us of the influence of the animation curriculum at the California Institute of the Arts, where Burton and *Nightmare* director Henry Selick got their degrees. CalArts has rightly been celebrated for its role in educating CG innovators like Pixar's John Lasseter and Brad Bird, but it's also a school where stop-motion continues to thrive.

As a key part of CalArts' Experimental Animation Program, stop-motion classes are taken by both BFA and MFA students. They gather in a hangar-like structure on the school's northern L.A. County campus—a space crammed with sketches, puppet-parts and posters for Burton's *Corpse Bride* and Aardman Animations' *Chicken Run*. "CalArts stands out in its commitment to stop-motion," observes Laura Heit, who co-directs the program with Paul Vester. "We're the only one," she remarks. "Rhode Island [School of Design] has a little stop-motion, but it's just for BFA students. The Art Institute has one class and SCAD has a couple. We're trying to keep up with the demand. Perhaps because of *Corpse Bride* and Aardman's films, interest has really

grown. People think, 'You actually can do this stuff.'"

Heit, who's been at CalArts for three years, both teaches stop-motion classes and mentors MFA students. "We typically accept 10 to 14 BFAs and 14 to 16 MFAs," she explains. "We have classes in beginning, intermediate and advanced stop-motion, in lighting and camera, and an alternative technique class focusing on experimentation. Students don't have a lot of time to experiment in stop-motion because they spend so much time building puppets and sets, and then end up having a

week left for animation! So we try to push experimentation—playing with time, shadows and light, and long exposures. I make them shoot with handheld cameras so they don't see movements until later—like shooting film. Students today don't have that experience, so this makes them think differently and push everything but the puppet."

At the same time, CalArts' use of digital tools like Adobe After Effects and Stop-Motion Pro do make this traditionally time-intensive art form more accessible, Heit observes. "It's generally easy to start over, and it doesn't cost anything to throw something away. You just

need a laptop and a camera." Today's flexibility can be seen in the variety of works-in-progress by Heit's MFA students: Dillon Markey's thesis film mixes stop-motion, pixellization and CG, while Jesse Gregg has built an intricate village that would make the Brothers Grimm smile. Nicole Emmons is photographing her elaborate forest set with a huge motion control

continued on page 70



Henry Selick



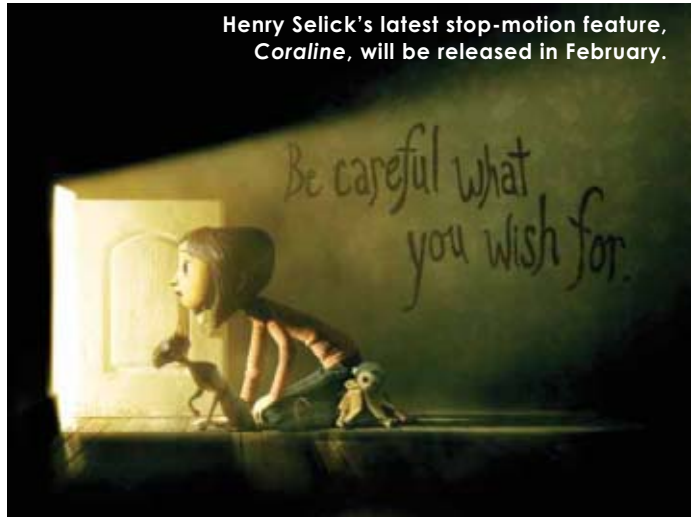
Laura Heit



Danielle Ash's student project, *Pickles for Nickles*



Nicole Emmons' *Echoes*



Henry Selick's latest stop-motion feature, *Coraline*, will be released in February.

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rig, while John Joyce is animating his film in his bedroom at home.

A willingness to experiment has been central to this program since its founding in 1970 by the late *Fantasia* animator Jules Engel. "Jules supervised the program for years," recalls Henry Selick, who credits Engel for introducing him to "weird" international animation. "He called us 'talents,' not students. He was like a doctor prescribing the visual medicine that his patients needed." After Selick earned his CalArts MFA in 1977, he created award-winning stop-motion for MTV before tackling *Nightmare* and *James and the Giant Peach*. Fittingly, for his latest stop-motion film *Coraline*, Selick had several CalArts alumni on his LAIKA studio set in Portland, Oregon. "A third of the crew were young people who had taken up stop-motion in recent years. Clearly, people are learning great skills."

"I'm gratified that there are plenty of young people taking this up," Selick says. "I have hope they'll build on what we've done and bring their own sensibilities. On television in particular there is more experimental stuff and a lot more risk taking, with things like [adult swim]."

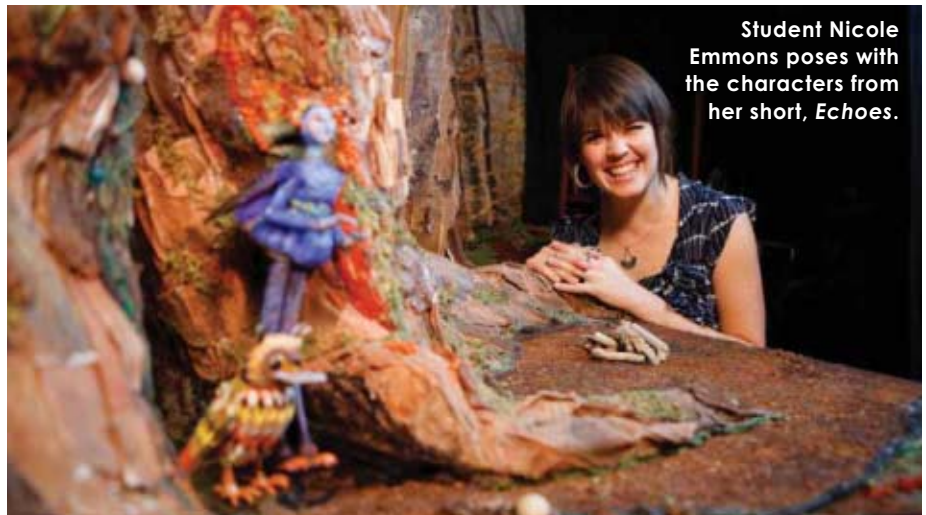
Not surprisingly, TV animation shops were cited as places of opportunity by the MFA students that will soon be looking for jobs. Dillon Markey notes that several Los Angeles studios regularly help CalArts students. "The Chiodo Brothers have been willing to make top-notch armatures for us at student prices. And we've gone there for classes."

Laura Heit, whose resume includes directing animation for London's Slinky Pictures and L.A.'s Duck Studios, thinks that CalArts' Experimental Program prepares its graduates fairly broadly. "They're working on skills that could get them hired as animators within a studio system. But students going through this program either have a more artistic intention or they'll want to work in smaller companies where they can be more involved in the creation of the final product. At the smaller stop-motion companies, they do get to do a little of everything."

"It's still a very difficult, challenging



CalArts' Experimental Program co-director Laura Heit assists student Jesse Gregg on his project.



Student Nicole Emmons poses with the characters from her short, *Echoes*.

"Stop motion is still a very difficult, challenging way to do animation. You put in a lot of hours for a few seconds. But you almost giggle when you bring something to life; when you can get something to act and have a sense of weight and scale."

—*Coraline* director and CalArts alumnus Henry Selick

way to do animation," Selick cautions. "You put in a lot of hours for a few seconds. But you almost giggle when you bring something to life; when you can get something to act and have a sense of weight and scale." Selick's optimism about the future of this medium has been fueled by what he's seen in the student portfolios of recent CalArts students. "Their art work is more sophisticated and worldly than it was in my day. It was pretty astonishing to see. I've gotta say I don't think I would get into this school if I applied now!" ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in animation, vfx and higher education.



CalArts student Dillon Markey faces off with one of the characters from his thesis project.

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In honor of the Powerpuff Girls' 10th birthday, we caught up with creator **Craig McCracken**, hard at work on their brand-new TV special **The Powerpuff Girls Rule!** down at the Cartoon Network studios in Burbank, Calif. Be sure to pick up **The Powerpuff Girls: The Complete Series**—10th Anniversary Edition DVDs Jan. 20. And keep reading Animag for updates on McCracken's newest project, Cartooonstitute!



6:30 a.m.: "Just a few more moments and his mind is mine—damn, he's awake!"



11:20 a.m.: Cartoons be serious business, and suckas don't front.



2:23 p.m.: Deranged CalArts students occasionally hold us hostage with pointy sticks in the pitch room.



8:45 a.m.: Craig arrives at his box-away-from home in Burbank.



11:24 a.m.: As much as animators love meetings, Craig feels the urge to camouflage himself.



3:15 p.m.: Taunting voice actors is a great way to relieve stress. "Do it again, but different... Heh heh."



1:00 p.m.: Do NOT take Rob's photo when he's having a bad hair day.



3:56 p.m.: "We need more 'Cs' in this episode."



9:02 a.m.: "Welcome to my 'power office.' Enjoy the panoramic view of bricks."



10:36 a.m.: Craig starts the day with another fine knuckle drawing.



1:45 p.m.: "Dude, Brian Wilson's not gonna write you back."



5:38 p.m.: It all comes together; frame by frame by frame...





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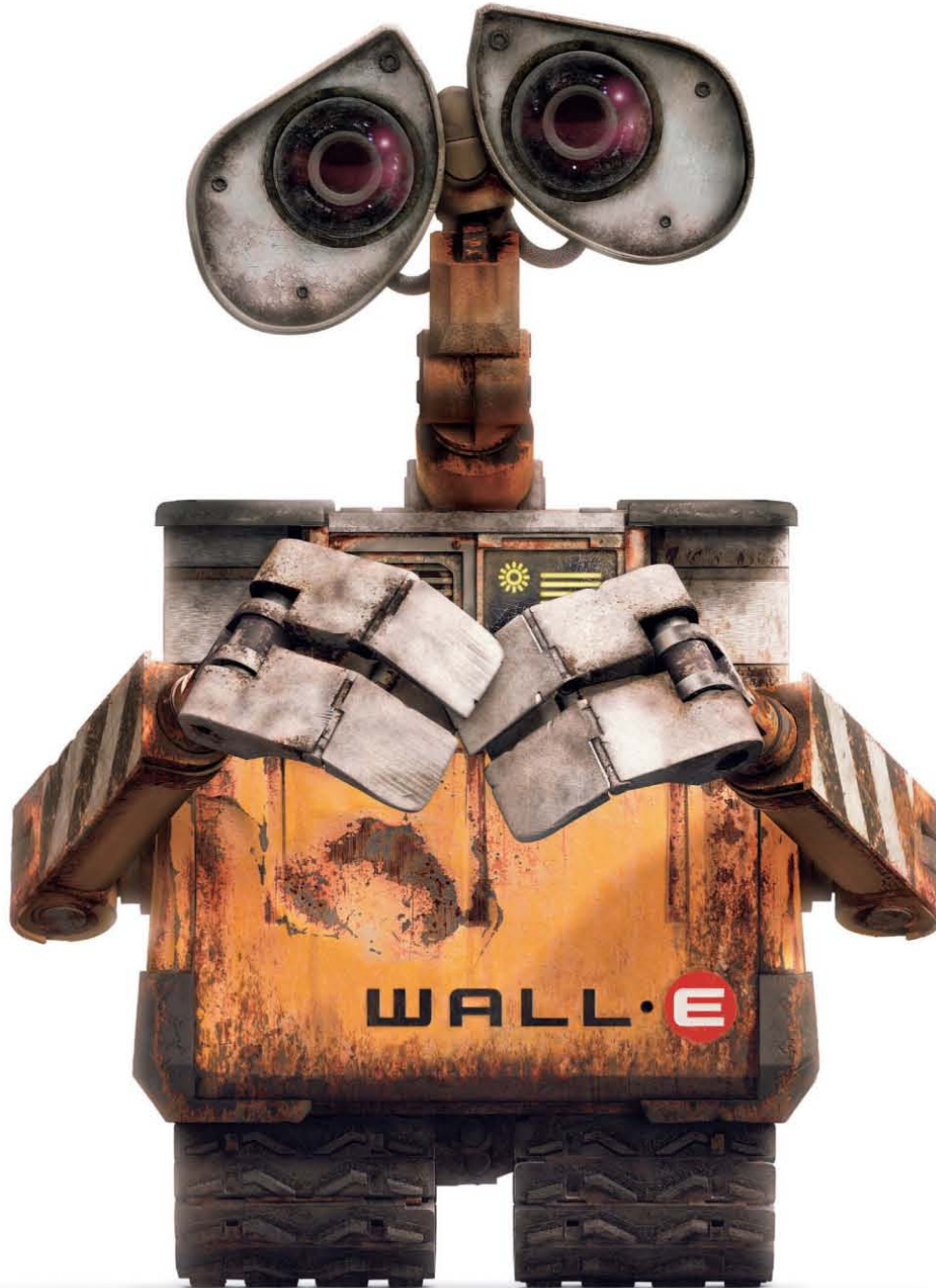
Chris Williams

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